OLD!

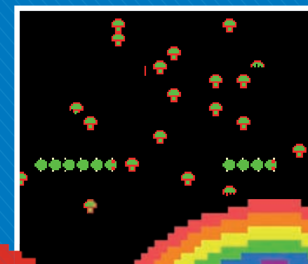
THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

retro GAMER™

AMSTRAD | COMMODORE | SEGA | NINTENDO | ATARI | SINCLAIR | NEO GEO | SONY | COIN-OP | MOBILE

SIGN UP!
TO THE RETRO GAMER WEBSITE AND PROFILE YOUR FAVOURITE GAMES
RETROGAMER.NET

THE DEFINITIVE
CENTIPEDE
YOUR UNMISSABLE GUIDE TO ATARI'S HIT ARCADE FRANCHISE





Celebrating one of the most colourful arcade platformers of all time

IN THE CHAIR WITH...
DAVID CRANE
THE CO-FOUNDER OF ACTIVISION ON HIS THREE-DECADE CAREER

THE HISTORY OF
MICRO MACHINES
TRACKING THE EVOLUTION OF CODEMASTERS' SUPERB RACER

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES
FILL UP ON NOSTALGIA JUICE AND REVISIT THE GOOD OLD DAYS

IN THIS ISSUE OF RETRO GAMER

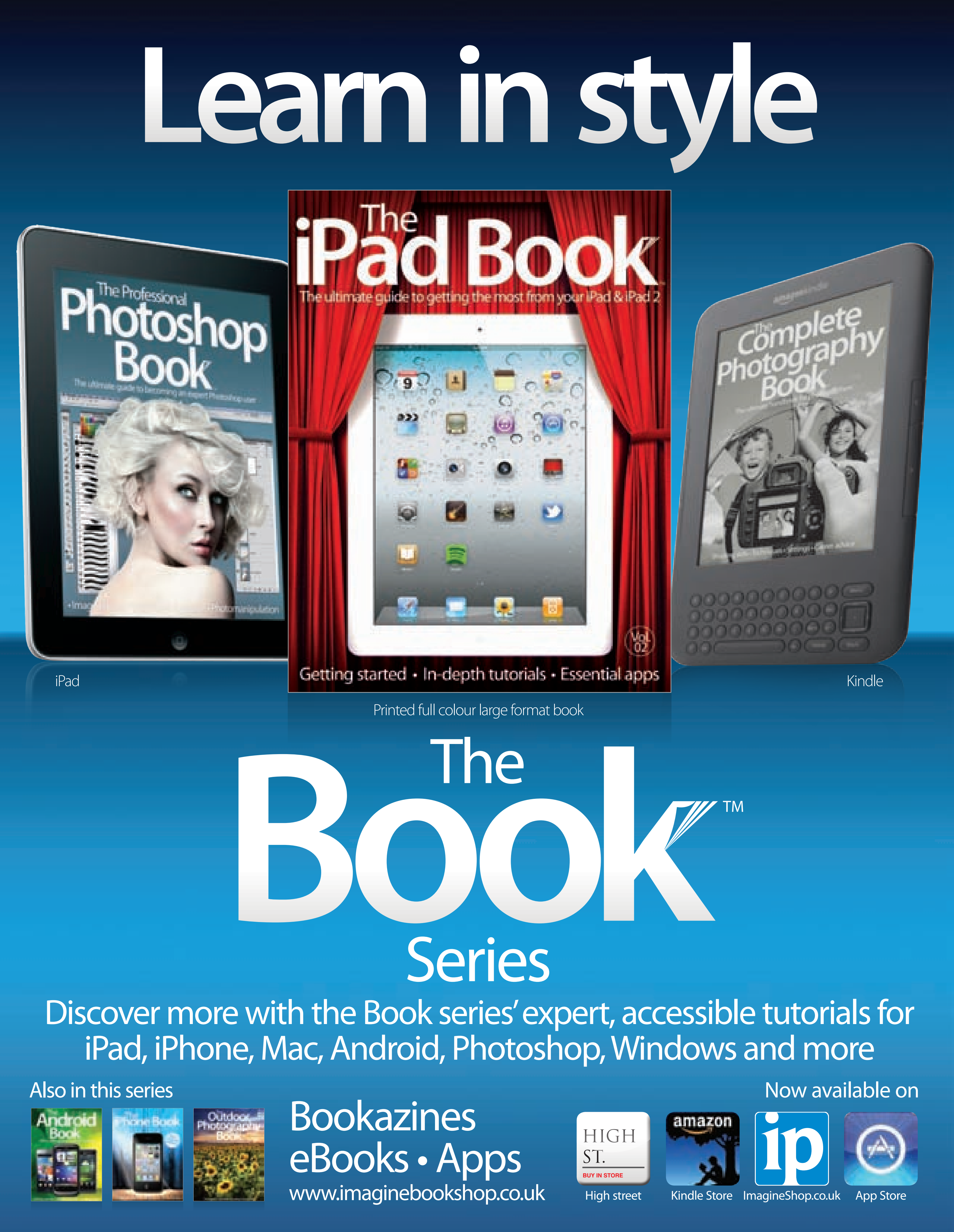
STAR FOX 64
WHY NINTENDO'S EPIC SHOOTER REMAINS A STONE COLD CLASSIC

KIKSTART I & II
WE GO BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE HIT 8-BIT MOTORCYCLE SERIES

STAR RAIDERS
THE FULL STORY ABOUT ATARI'S ASTONISHING SHOOT-'EM-UP

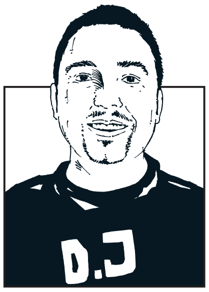
ISSUE 79 £4.99 NOWGamer.com
IMAGINE PUBLISHING

RETRO GAMER
LOAD 79


Learn in style
The Professional Photoshop Book
The iPad Book
The ultimate guide to getting the most from your iPad & iPad 2
Getting started • In-depth tutorials • Essential apps
Vol. 02
The Complete Photography Book
iPad
Kindle
Printed full colour large format book
The Book™ Series
Discover more with the Book series' expert, accessible tutorials for iPad, iPhone, Mac, Android, Photoshop, Windows and more
Also in this series
Android Book
iPhone Book
Outdoor Photography Book
Bookazines
eBooks • Apps
www.imaginebookshop.co.uk
Now available on
HIGH ST.
BUY IN STORE
High street
amazon
Kindle Store
ip
ImagineShop.co.uk
App Store

THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE JOFFA GAME?



DARRAN JONES
Has to be *Hyper Sports* on the Spectrum. I have many happy memories of playing it around my friend Paul's house. Rest in peace, Joffa.
Expertise:
Juggling a beautiful wife, two lovely girls and **Retro Gamer**
Currently playing:
Shadow Of The Colossus
Favourite game of all time:
Strider



STUART HUNT
I'm going for *Cobra*. For a movie-licensed game to actually be better than the movie it's based on it has to be something quite special.
Expertise:
Games with flying bits in them
Currently playing:
After Burner Climax
Favourite game of all time:
After Burner Climax



JASON KELK
I spent hours enjoying *Firefly*, and I was looking forward to *Saucer* for the Spectrum… but he'll never get to finish it now.
Expertise:
Pong variants!
Currently playing:
Hydorah (PC)
Favourite game of all time:
Io



CRAIG GRANNELL
In among a small but perfectly formed collection of Speccy arcade conversions sits abstract shooter *Firefly*. Smith said it was his favourite Speccy creation, so who am I to argue? RIP Joffa.
Expertise:
Games you don't need 37 fingers to control
Currently playing:
Pix 'N Love Rush
Favourite game of all time:
H.E.R.O.



DAVID CROOKES
Pud Pud. An early sign of genius from one of the best early day programmers. RIP Joffa.
Expertise: All things Amstrad CPC, *Dizzy*, Atari Lynx and PlayStation
Currently playing:
Red Dead Redemption
Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword



PAUL DRURY
Daley Thompson's Supertest. A wonderful reason to bash the Speccy's zombie flesh. RIP Joffa.
Expertise:
Leaving embarrassing craters
Currently playing:
The Twilight Zone (pinball)
Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space

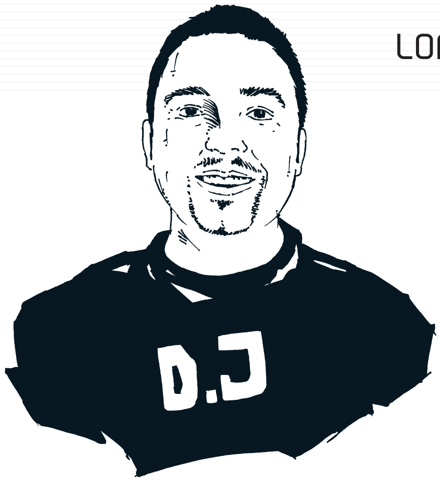


ASHLEY DAY
I'm not sure how involved he was with *Batman: The Caped Crusader*, but that's my pick from Joffa's softography. It was a great little game for its time.
Expertise:
Some games you probably hate
Currently playing:
Dragon Quest IX
Favourite game of all time:
Shining Force III



RICHARD BURTON
For me it's *Firefly*. It was a mishmash of genres with excellent graphics and humorous moments aplenty. Kind of summed up Joffa's style in a nutshell.
Expertise: Stuff and nonsense
Currently playing:
Dead Moon
Favourite game of all time:
Manic Miner

LOADING...



It's been a sad old time in the retro community this month, as we've lost two big names from the gaming scene. Chris Sievey, who was better known as his alter ego Frank Sidebottom, and Jonathan 'Joffa' Smith passed away within a week of each other.

Sievey created the excellent Spectrum game *The Biz*, notable for spawning Frank Sidebottom, while Smith needs no introduction, as he was behind some of Ocean and Imagine's most popular arcade conversions and film licences.

There's a little tribute to the two men on page 6, but in the meantime may I suggest that you head to the likes of eBay, or even the excellent World of Spectrum (where Smith was a regular on the forum), and get hold of their games and remember why you're going to miss them so much.

That's it from me this month, I'm genuinely too sad to write anything else.

Enjoy the magazine,





CONTENTS



>> Load 79 Breathing new life into classic games

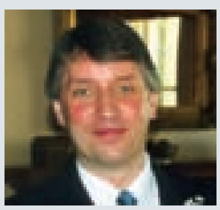
FEATURED

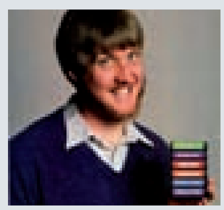
RETRO REVIVALS



In the hot seat this month…







"The absolute pinnacle of frenzied blasting" Tim Clare



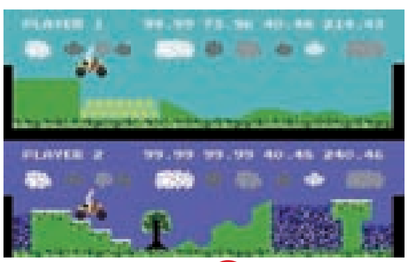
52 Classic Game
Tim Clare reveals why Fox McCloud's excellent 64-bit adventure is still the best game in the Star Fox franchise



68 Centipede
Stuart Campbell's latest definitive is on Atari's hit coin-op franchise



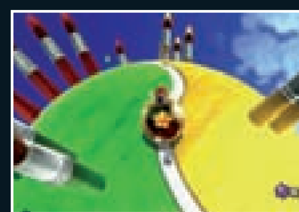
30 Gamate
The little-known rival to the Game Boy that just couldn't compete

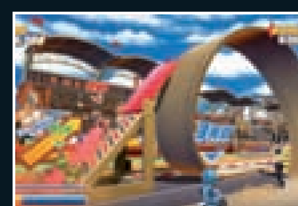


80 Kikstart Series
Shaun Southern and Andrew Morris discuss their hit motorbike franchise

ESSENTIALS

RETRO RATED

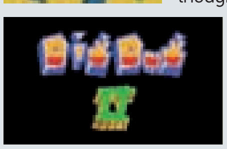




retro GAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL



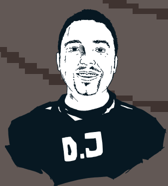
22 DIG DUG II
Unfortunately, the writer of this month's profile forgot to include their name. We're still going to include it, though, as it's really interesting to read





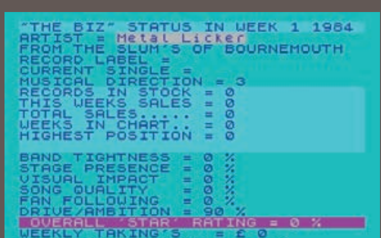
retro radar

>> GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD



>> It's with a heavy heart that we have to reveal the passing of two popular programmers, Chris 'Frank Sidebottom' Sievey and Jonathan 'Joffa' Smith. There's plenty of news from E3 as well, but it's hard to get excited about it now…

* CONTENTS



FRIENDS PAY TRIBUTE TO **TWO LEGENDS**


» Joffa was a popular figure on several retro forums.

It's been a difficult time for many Spectrum owners this month with the tragic news that two popular developers passed away within mere days of each other. The first upset was the sad loss of Chris Sievey who, shortly after being diagnosed with cancer in May 2010, died in his Hale home on 21 June.

A comedian and musician, Chris first found success in the late Seventies and early Eighties as the lead for punk band The Freshies, but later took on the persona of spherical-headed comedian and television presenter Frank Sidebottom, a character that was first introduced on a 12-inch single that came free with cult Spectrum game *The Biz*, which Sievey also programmed. He will be sadly missed.

Then, less than a week later, acclaimed Spectrum coder Jonathan 'Joffa' Smith died on the 26th due to causes that are currently unknown to us. While very shy of public attention, Smith was a regular contributor to many forums, most notably World of Spectrum, where he was affectionately known as Frobush. Popular due to his wacky sense of humour and his willingness to help out fellow coders, he was in the process of creating a brand new Spectrum game called *Saucer*.

Smith gained a massive following from Spectrum fans thanks to a collection of great original games and slick arcade conversions, ranging from *Green Beret* and *Hyper Sports* to *Firefly* and *Batman: The Caped Crusader*. He was just 43 when he died.

Co-workers and friends share memories of these two legends…



» Frank Sidebottom catches up with creator Chris Sievey..

Jim Bagley

I, like the masses, have always admired and enjoyed the games created by Jonathan 'Joffa Smiff' Smith. You could always tell a Joffa game, as it always had a bit of him in the mix. His sense of humour was second to none, and he always managed to squeeze that into his games to add his personal touch to them.

I joined Special FX near the end of 1987, when I first met the legend that was Joffa. With me also being a Spectrum coder, not only was I working alongside him, but I was also working in his shadow, which would have been a very hard thing to do, but Joffa was such a kind, helpful person, even showing me some of his tricks of the trade, like his two-channel drum sound routines on the Spectrum, and his method of drawing the screen using the stack. (I used both of these techniques in *Gutz*, my first Special FX game.)

While working alongside Joffa there was never a dull moment. With us all being young, we'd always be having a laugh while we worked. He made it such a great atmosphere, and although he was the co-founder, it never felt like he was a boss, but more of a friend. One Saturday, for instance, we were working late on our games, just the two of us in the office, and it got to around dinner time, and he just said: "Fancy a pint?" We went to the Pumphouse – the pub on the Albert Dock, in Liverpool, where Special FX was based – and we sat in there, and chatted about our games, life, pretty much everything, and didn't get out 'til late, then went back to the office, and fell asleep on our keyboards.

He was the life and soul of Special FX, which is strange for someone who was internally such a shy person. He never liked being in photos either; once both Tony Pomfret and myself had to grab Joffa by the arms, and keep hold of him while someone else took a photo of him for a mag interview. It was an honour and privilege to not only meet and work with Joffa, but to also be a friend of his. I will



» Joffa's conversion of *Hyper Sports* was highly praised.



» A star is born as *The Biz* spawns Frank Sidebottom.

always remember the things he taught me and appreciate the encouragement he gave me in my early years. RIP Joffa.

Gary Bracey

I had the privilege of working with Joffa for several years in the mid-late Eighties and in all that time I don't recall ever having a cross word with him. Unlike many others, he didn't write computer games for the glory or the money – he did it because he loved it. All he wanted to do was develop games – a task he performed with extraordinary ability, both graphically and code-wise. I truly believe that in those early days he was without peer, as his understanding of the games-writing process encompassed the technical and also the creative. In short, he was a very unique, talented individual, but a pretty nice guy also. His manner was shy, to the extent that he was almost uncomfortable in social situations. He was always a little embarrassed by the attention he received, but he had a wicked sense of humour, which was reflected in his games.

I lost touch with him after the early Special FX years, but he had set the standard that many other developers admired and aspired to. He certainly left an indelible impression on me, along with most other people he worked with. Joffa will be missed by not only those who knew him personally, but also the many thousands whose lives he touched with the games he made. Anyone who brings so much pleasure to so many people leaves a void that can never be filled. My thoughts and sympathies go to his family and friends at this sad time. Sleep in peace, Joff.

Dave Collier

I can remember the day Joffa came into Ocean Software to present his game. Jon Woods and Dave Ward were both elated that young Joffa had turned up at the door to present his game. "This guy is the real deal," may have been Jon's words. I do not remember how it worked for Joffa but with most guys in the early days who turned up, if they showed talent and enthusiasm a job was usually placed on the table. Eventually he was working in-house as a programmer. I strongly believe the games we turned out influenced young kids to become programmers. Many people who are the next generation of coders have all played those old games that were the start of games as we know them today. I often get a strange glare and, 'Are you the Dave Collier who wrote those C64 games? Awesome, dude,' so I am sure Joffa got the same acknowledgment for his game-writing skills. We kept those kids off the streets and gave them a new career choice. Affecting others is the sign of a well-spent life, and Joffa affected us all.

Iain Lee

I was a huge Frank fan and was lucky enough to get to know both Chris and Frank quite well over the years. I interviewed Frank several times, appeared on his TV show, and did a few gigs with him.

Frank was born as a promotional aid for ZX Spectrum game *The Biz*, a band management simulator written by Sievey. The game has long since been forgotten, but Frank went on to become an industry in himself.

> **"It's only recently that people tracked him down and told him how inspirational he was"**
>
> HOW THE INTERNET BROUGHT FAME TO JOFFA

The last show I did with him was in 2009 at the 100 Club. I was sat backstage with Chris, who was getting more and more pissed. He was being charming and borrowed someone's guitar and just sat there, making up songs and being lovely. I was slightly worried, though, as to how a drunk Frank Sidebottom was going to go down. I needn't have been concerned. It was one of the best live performances I have ever seen.

In front of a disappointing turnout of about 35 people, Frank extended his 20-minute slot and went on for well over an hour. It was an epic performance that had everybody in stitches. When he was finished, instead of going off and resting, he sat on the edge of the stage for another 20 minutes, selling badges while I did my best to wrap up the evening and send everyone home.

Chris died with very little money and was facing a pauper's funeral. But a Twitter campaign started by journalist Jon Ronson raised over £21,000 for him in a few days. I think that shows just how much love there was for the big-headed singer from Timperley. Let's just hope his mum doesn't find out about the money, as she will certainly give him what for. You know she will; she really will. Thank you.

Paul Hughes

When I joined Ocean at the back end of 1987, Joff was the first person that I spoke to. I'm not ashamed to admit that I was completely in awe of him – in the many years to follow he still referred to me as his biggest fan! Just before he left Ocean to form Special FX with Paul Finnegan I had the privilege of sharing a room with him, working on a C64 version of a game idea that he had called *Newt* – a *Cobra* killer!

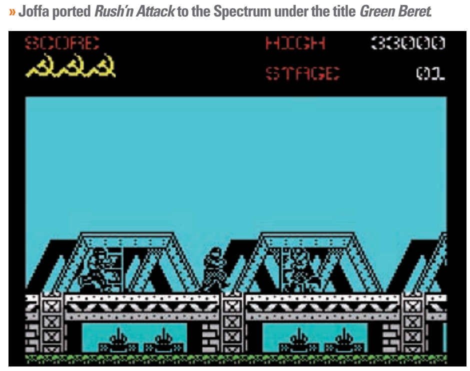
The game only had a few weeks development before he went off to the Albert Dock – it did become a game eventually under the Special FX banner: *Hyper Active* – but in that short time I got to learn how he worked. It was a fascinating, darkly funny exercise in how to develop a game at breakneck speed – that was one hell of an education. I learned more in that three weeks about the business of writing games than any course, book or exam – lessons I still pass on to this day.

The word 'genius' is banded out a lot these days, but my lord, Joff personified it. I've never met anyone since who was just so far ahead of the curve. From his interleaved data/mask sprite plots to his self-generating code for pre-shifted block scrolling on *Cobra*, this young lad constantly thought outside the box and left us all slack-jawed.

Joff kept himself to himself and didn't really play the fame game – it's only recently, with the dawn of the internet, that people tracked him down and let him know just how inspirational he was at the start of our fledgling industry. In a bizarre twist he became more famous later in life due to the retro resurgence for games he had worked on decades previously.

At least he left us knowing that people truly appreciated his work and looked up to him as a developer to aspire to. Thanks to the many, many great games he developed, he has left a legacy behind that will ensure that although he's gone, he will never be forgotten. *

» Joffa ported *Rush'n Attack* to the Spectrum under the title *Green Beret*.



retro columns

>> RETRO RECOLLECTIONS WITH CELEB IAIN LEE

Here's the bio…
Iain Lee has been a fervent gamer since he was tiny. And that was a long time ago. In between playing computer games and collecting crap from eBay, he has presented Channel 4's *The 11 O'Clock Show* and *Rise*, and currently does bits of stand-up as well as presenting the *2 Hour Long Late Night Radio Show* on Absolute Radio at 11pm.

Hi there, my name's **Iain Lee**. You might remember me from Thumb Bandits, The 11 O'Clock Show and Absolute Radio, but now I'm here to confess my love for retro



Booze and Violence

If you believe what you read in the *Daily Mail* then you would think that only recently have kids discovered binge drinking and violent videogames. That before the year 2000 young people all played outside safely with sticks and hoops and then rushed home for a nice refreshing glass of Crusha. Mmm… wish I hadn't written that. I'm actually going to have pop out later and buy myself some.

The truth is: kids have been boozing and kicking the crap out of each other, in both the physical and the virtual world, for decades. I remember being 14 years old and sitting in Upton Park in Slough with a group of older lads as they persuaded me that it *was* in fact a good idea to drink a whole bottle of Thunderbird in one go. It wasn't. Strange. Typing 'Thunderbird' has not had the same euphoric recall that typing 'Crusha' did. I think that's a good thing.

And while there certainly are a slew of violent games out now, we had plenty 20-odd years ago. *Yie-Ar Kung Fu* was far more violent than *Tekken* or any other martial arts games you get nowadays. If I remember correctly, someone had a pair of nunchucks. I don't know if you've ever played with a pair of chucks, but they are well dangerous. And the nunchuck fights were always cut out of UK releases of Bruce Lee films because they were, well, so naughty I guess.

While right-wing scaremongers may recoil in horror at the violence portrayed in the *Call Of Duty* series, where were they in 1985 when the *Rambo* game burst onto our scenes? You went round shooting the crap out of things. Exactly the same, except without the tedious and 'shoved in just to be controversial' airport level.

And *Raid Over Moscow* was worse than… no, hang on. *Raid Over Moscow* was just a bad, overrated game.

The point is: violence has always been a part of play. Cowboys and Indians, war, British Bulldog. It's all part of growing up and coming to terms with what is actually a pretty f*cked up world that our parents have dragged us into.

Before you say games are worse for our children today because of the realistic graphics and sound, I'll stop you. You're wrong. It's precisely because the machines were so limited technically that the games seemed more violent then. While playing *Rambo* on the Spectrum, I wasn't aware of the terrible graphics and awful colour clash. I was there, man. I was in Vietnam. Those games relied so much more on imagination, that I know I was certainly transported to the worlds in which they were set. When someone plays *Call Of Duty* today, are they transported? I would suggest not; it's more obvious to them that they're playing a game.

Hey, enough of all this cod-psychology. What the hell do I know? I have just one more word to say on the subject. Crusha.

> When someone plays COD today, are they transported? I would suggest not

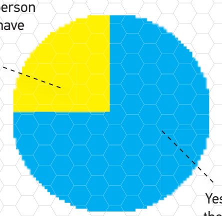


» [Wii] All the familiar weapons return, along with greatly enhanced graphics, controls and AI.

FORUM OPINION

VISIT **RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM** TO HAVE YOUR SAY

Are you looking forward to the new GoldenEye?



"Sure it will be good to see how it turns out. The original is still great to play, but first-person shooters have now moved on to a hyper-generic cut-and-paste genre" **– nakamura**

"I have massive doubts and can't really view this as anything other than a cash-in, seeing as Daniel Craig has been slapped on it. Activision should buy the *LOTR* franchise off EA and create *GollumEye* instead" **– famicom69**

WAGGLED, NOT STIRRED

SMASH HIT GOLDENEYE TO BE REBORN FOR NINTENDO

Well this came out of nowhere. Activision used E3 to announce the return of *GoldenEye*, easily one of the greatest console first-person shooters ever made, in enhanced form. And boy, are we excited.

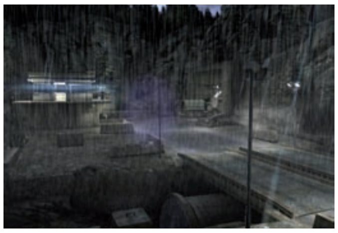
After Rare's own Xbox Live Arcade version was cruelly canned at the last minute, despite being allegedly fully completed, it seemed that all hope was lost and that we'd have to resign ourselves to more horrors like *GoldenEye: Rogue Agent*. Fortunately, it would appear that this is no longer the case, as Activision is promising an exciting new reboot of the hit game.

Considering the popularity of the original N64 title and how it's still fondly spoken of today – it sold over 8 million units on release – it's surprising that it has taken so long for a publisher to revisit the original. The task of creating a game that not only appeals to the modern gamer, but also has enough in it to feel unmistakably like the original game falls to British developer Eurocom.

While much of the game is still being kept under wraps, it has been confirmed that all the original multiplayer maps are included, online support will be for up to eight players, and that a variety of control options will be available, ranging from the usual Wii point-and-shoot method, to being able to use the Classic Controller. Easily the biggest change to the game, though, is the introduction of Daniel Craig. While some aren't happy with his inclusion, it makes perfect sense seeing as he's the current James Bond. Eurocom is also promising that the inclusion of Craig's Bond will add new dynamics to the game, including more close-quarters combat.

While not a direct update like *Perfect Dark* on Xbox Live Arcade, we've every confidence that Eurocom will be able to pull this off. Imagine, for example, if you could use the boat to get to the fabled island that was unlocked with the N64's Action Replay, or if all the cheats from the original game are included. While it's true that the controls could do with being slightly tweaked, the core gameplay itself still stands up after all this time. Expand on the original objectives or maybe add in a few exciting set pieces – it's already been confirmed that you'll be able to drive a tank – and the potential for this remake is endless.

While some will no doubt be upset that this is coming out on just the Wii and DS, we'd much rather have this than nothing at all. And besides, it would be really strange to play *GoldenEye* on anything other than a Nintendo console.





MICRO BYTES

Snippets of news from the exciting world of retro



» Rez returns

If Darran was disappointed with the lack of a new *Strider* game at E3, *Child Of Eden* certainly made up for it. The spiritual sequel to Sega's awesome *Rez* – it takes place in the same setting and features near-identical gameplay mechanics – *Child Of Eden* not only has *Rez* creator Tetsuya Mizuguchi at the helm, but is also fully compatible with both Kinect and Move. No firm release date yet, but we're betting that it will be a launch title for both peripherals.



» Castlemania

While *Lords Of Shadow* continues to excite us, another *Castlevania* was announced at E3. *Castlevania: Harmony Of Despair* is an online title that, unlike previous games, allows you to see the entire map. It will have multiplayer and not feature an experience system. While the visuals appear to be ripped from recent handheld titles, online multiplayer greatly excites us. Expect a review next month.



» Get over here!

Mortal Kombat fans were treated to a double delight at E3. In addition to a brand new game, which looks amazingly gory and right up our alley, Warner Bros showed off a short film entitled *Mortal Kombat: Rebirth*. Created by Kevin Tancharoen as a pitch for a new movie, it captures the atmosphere perfectly, even if it doesn't follow the mythology of the games. Check it out at **www.youtube.com/watch?v=9_MqZn7E-mk**

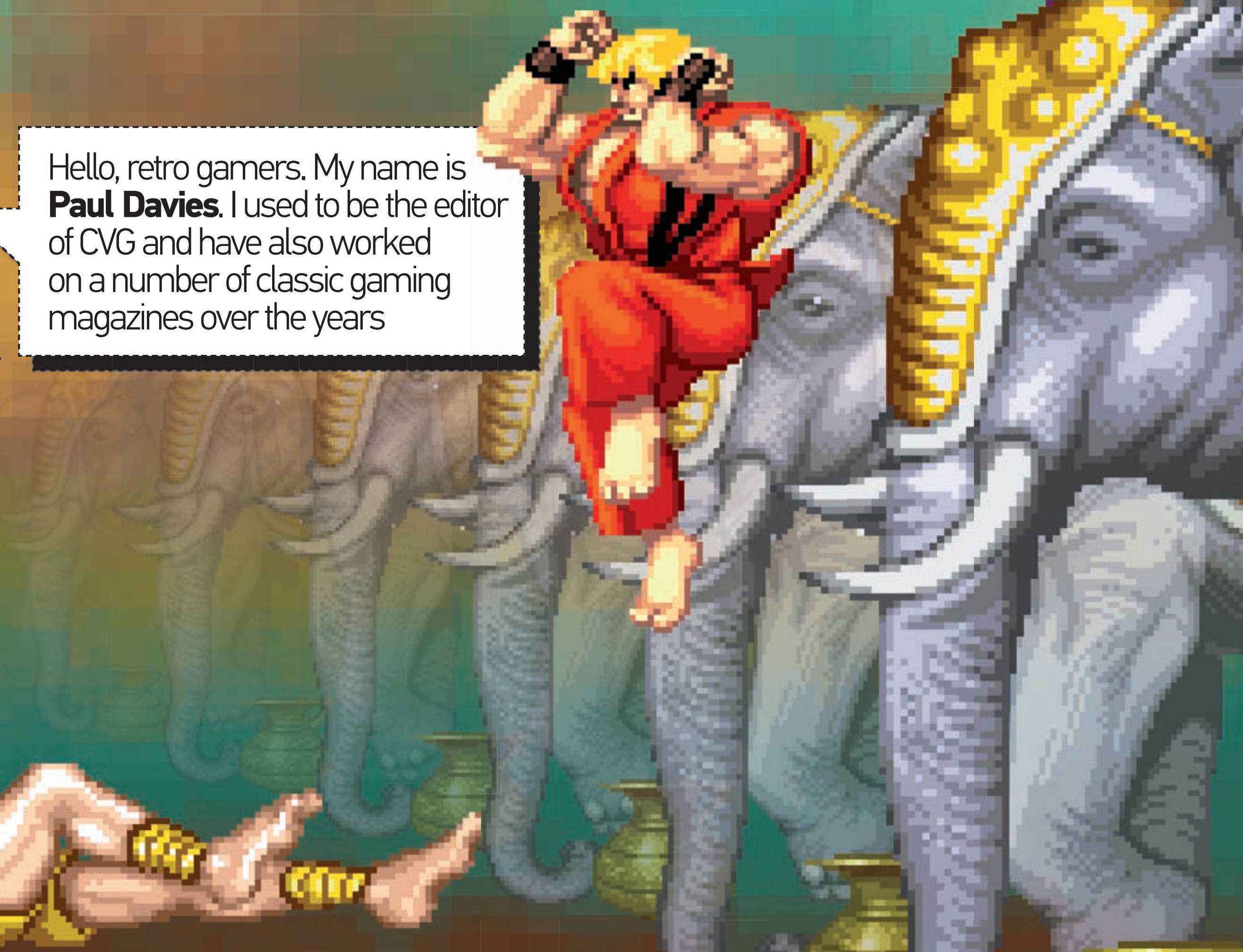
retrocolumns

>> PAUL DAVIES GIVES HIS VIEWS ON THE RETRO WORLD

Here's my bio…
In 1992 I started out on *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System*. In 1995 I became editor of *CVG*. I led the *CVG* website from 1998 until Christmas 2000, then I left journalism to be concept design manager at Criterion Games. I returned to journalism in 2002 and from 2005 I've been running my own company, Unlikely Hero.



Hello, retro gamers. My name is **Paul Davies**. I used to be the editor of CVG and have also worked on a number of classic gaming magazines over the years



Which version is better?

Feeling inferior was all part of the fun back in the day. I enjoyed kidding myself that the Sega logo on my Master System pad meant that *R-Type* and *Double Dragon* were as good as it gets.

There's a discussion to be had about loading times, somewhere along the line. But don't worry, it isn't about to happen this month. However, the reason I mention loading times is because they've probably taken more flak than has been fair all things considered. I mean, I'm sitting here waiting for my PS3 to load after the umpteenth update, let alone any of its games.

But enough about loading times (for now). I'd like to share that I'm glad we can all still think about the best versions of the most important games. It's the kind of concern that can wake me up at 4am in a cold sweat, while at the same time unifying me with my underperforming brothers. I was snobby about my Super NES version of *SF II*, because even though it only had two elephants and the arcade version had four, it was cooler than the Mega Drive version. Yeah, the MD got *Special Champion Edition* first, but Ryu sounded like a Dalek.

I missed out on the ST and Amiga; they sort of arrived during the time I wanted to be Dee Snider instead of Jet Set Willy. So I was always one of those guys looking at the US Gold ads on the back of *ACE*, drooling over 'arcade perfect' screenshots of Capcom coin-ops. This was stretching the truth, but they looked way better than the alternatives on the ZX Spectrum 128. I guess you could call them art.

Lots of colours, enormous sprites, parallax scrolling… one day, when I'm rich. But even now, with a 360 and PlayStation 3 at home, there are still sleepless nights and back-patting conversations to be had about which console is running the best version of *Super Street Fighter IV* Apparently the colours are brighter on PS3, but the 360 has additional self-shadows. Help me, God.

Flicking between *Splinter Cell Conviction* on 360 and PC; is it different? I'll keep quiet and stay protective about the version I currently own. I say currently as I like to leave myself the option of trading in for the forum favourite, in case someone from the Best Version police comes knocking. "Are you aware that Sam Fisher boasts fewer textures, Mr Davies?"

There's not a lot between versions and conversions these days, whereas attempting *Forgotten Worlds* on ZX Spectrum was worse than playing Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture* on a kazoo. But you had the nice box, and the belief that somewhere in here was the true spirit of *Forgotten Worlds*. Loading times though, eh? They're always contentious.

Are you aware that Sam Fisher boasts fewer textures, Mr Davies?

NINTENDO WINS E3

THE BIG N REVEALS PLENTY OF RETRO GOODNESS

If E3 proved one thing this year, it's that now is an amazing time to be a fan of retro gaming. While there were plenty of new titles that excited us – we're particularly looking forward to *Bulletstorm, Dead Space 2* and *Vanquish* – the number of old franchises that were resurrected was absolutely astonishing. A new *Contra*, a new *Need For Speed*, more *Driver*, more *Castlevania*, the return of *GoldenEye*… It just went on and on and on and will be covered in more depth over the rest of the news section.

There was one company more than any other, though, that filled our hearts with joy, and that company was Nintendo. The biggest star of its line-up was easily the 3DS, which, while being a new handheld that features cutting-edge 3D technology, already boasts plenty of classic franchises. *Resident Evil*, *Metal Gear Solid*, *Dead Or Alive*, *Street Fighter*, *Bomberman*, *Contra*, *Frogger*, *A Boy And His Blob*, *Pac-Man*, *Galaga*, *Ridge Racer*, *Sonic*, *Super Monkey Ball*, *Dragon Quest*, *Final Fantasy*, *Ninja Gaiden* and *Driver* have all been announced as being in production, which is an impressive line-up by anyone's standards.

Nintendo's showing was even better, and while cynics will argue that the company is simply recycling the same old franchises, there's no denying just how popular those franchises still are. The biggest surprise was the announcement of a brand new *Kid Icarus* game. Pit hasn't starred in his own game since 1991's *Of Myths And Monsters*, so we're particularly interested to see how his new adventure fares. Built from the ground up for the 3DS and featuring some great flying sections, Nintendo is promising an exciting adventure for *Kid Icarus: Uprising*, with early videos suggesting a *Sin And Punishment* vibe, which we're more than happy with.

Another classic franchise also receiving a long overdue update is *Pilotwings*. Little is known about *Pilotwings Resort* at this moment in time, other than that the playable demo featured the island from *Wii Sports Resort* and also had Miis. Whether these will remain in the final game is unclear, but we're certainly excited about the prospects that 3D will add to this fun franchise.

The most significant additions to Nintendo's 3DS line-up, however, were the remakes of both *Star Fox 64* and *The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time*. While not as graphically impressive as the new titles, we're simply salivating at the prospect of getting to grips with these classic games again, particularly as there are bound to be plenty of new gameplay tweaks to make more use of the 3DS's abilities. Imagine 3D puzzles in *Ocarina Of Time*. We're getting giddy just thinking about it. Other mouth-watering 3DS offerings from Nintendo included *Animal Crossing*, a brilliant-looking *Paper Mario*, and a brand new *Mario Kart* game. Not a bad selection at all.

"The 3DS, while featuring cutting-edge 3D technology, already boasts plenty of classic franchises"

» [3DS] The return of *Kid Icarus* excites us greatly, especially as it looks a lot like *Sin And Punishment*.





» [3DS] The 3DS has plenty of great-looking titles, including a brand new instalment in the *Paper Mario* series.



» [Wii] Donkey Kong and Diddy Kong return in a brand new adventure. We can't wait for this one.

It wasn't just the 3DS receiving all the focus, however, as Nintendo had some impressive-looking Wii games as well. *Metroid: Other M* still looks absolutely amazing, with superb action and exploration sequences that skilfully combine the 2D action of older titles like *Super Metroid* with the 3D antics of *Metroid Prime*. While some have lambasted the involvement of Team Ninja, fearing that its vision of Samus's world would be too far away from the exploration that made the series such a joy to play, its latest showing proves that the early fears were unfounded.

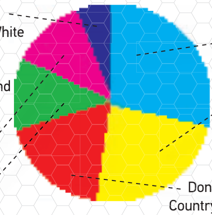
While more news on *Other M* was a pleasant surprise – it was, after all, revealed the previous year – the news of a new *Donkey Kong* title knocked us for six. Dubbed *Donkey Kong Country Returns* and helmed by Retro Studios, the new platformer looks wonderful. It effortlessly manages to recapture the style of Rare's original SNES games, but still has a pleasing freshness to it. Nintendo's debut video gave very little away other than that the action once again focuses on Donkey Kong and Diddy Kong and that they have a number of new abilities that weren't in the original games. Another confirmed addition is a proper multiplayer mode that greatly expands on the method used in the original SNES game.

Nintendo's last big offering was a new *Kirby* title called *Kirby's Epic Yarn*. Stylistically fantastic – Kirby and enemies are made from string, while the world they inhabit appears to be made from various fabrics – it features plenty of clever gameplay mechanics, massive bosses and a huge variety of different forms for Kirby. It's been quite a while since he's had a proper 2D outing that wasn't on a handheld – we're still trying to forget the atrocity that was *Kirby's Air Ride* – so we'll be keeping a very close eye on him over the coming months. *

FORUM OPINION

VISIT RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM TO HAVE YOUR SAY

What Nintendo E3 game are you most looking forward to?



"I want them all. I had all but given up on the majority of games coming out. Then Nintendo stole the show" – **famicom69**

"*Kirby* for me, followed by *Metroid*, *Zelda* and *DK*, in that order" – **AlleyKat**

"*Kirby*. Not since *Paper Mario* has a visual style been so charming and inventive. Really looking forward to this" – **Megamixer**

Retro Booty

TREASURES FROM THE RETRO DEEP



Pac Invaders football T-shirt

■ **RRP:** £14.95

■ **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com

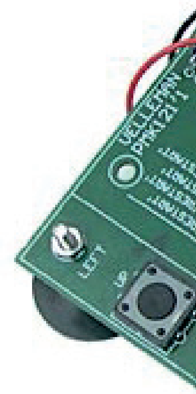
To commiserate how badly England did in this year's World Cup, why not treat yourself to this humorous retro T-shirt that shows champions Real *Pac-Man* going up against plucky challengers The *Space Invaders* Doms in the Arcade Cup. It was a pretty good match too until Pac-Man swallowed the ball.

Classic video table tennis kit

■ **RRP:** $19.99

■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com

We do question why anyone would want to go through so much trouble just to play a version of *Pong* on their TV – the sense of achievement that comes from being able to read a set of instructions and use a soldering iron without killing yourself must count for a lot, we guess. Simply follow the instructions, connect the dots correctly, insert three AAA batteries and a two-player version of virtual table tennis is yours to enjoy.





Mini Sega arcade machines

■ **RRP:** $12.50

■ **Buy it from:** www.ncsxshop.com

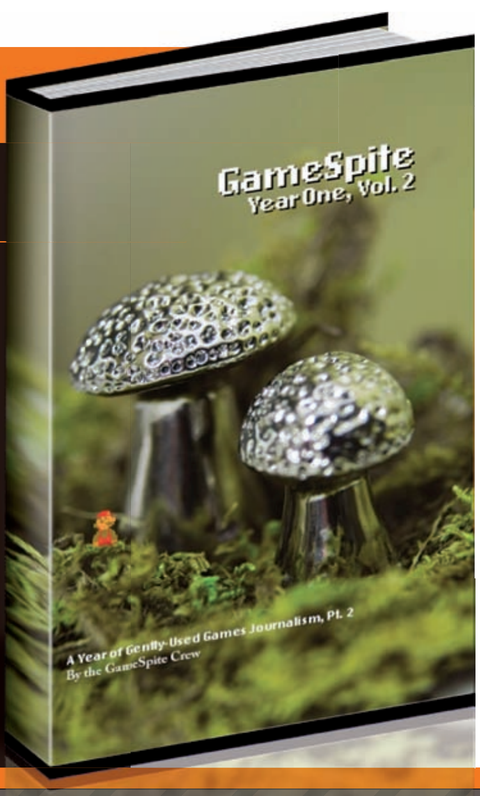
Ever wondered how frustrating it must be for Godzilla to travel to Tokyo and then be unable to play on all the excellent machines inside Akihabara arcade? Well, wonder no more thanks to these 7.5cm miniature replica models of various Sega arcade machines. Featuring the games *Dynamite Deka*, *Gain Ground* and *Virtua Fighter 2*, and Sega's UFO cab, they're wonderfully detailed and a must for any Godzilla loyalist.

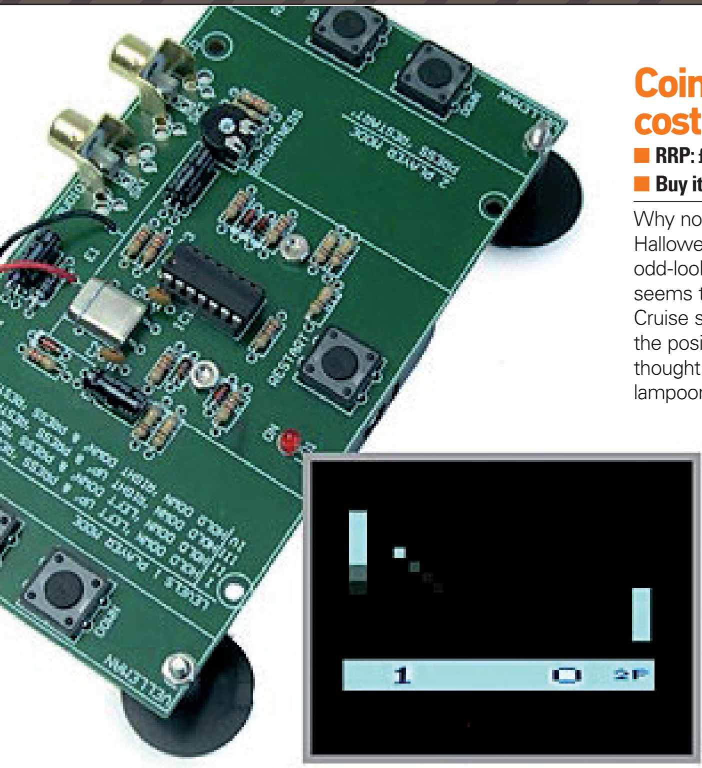
TREASURE OF THE MONTH

GameSpite Year 1: Volume 2

■ **RRP:** £11.84 (softcover) ■ **Buy it from:** www.blurb.com

We're huge fans of Jeremy Parish's GameSpite website, which offers a mixture of new and retro gaming news and articles that are always entertainingly written. Often, Jeremy and the GameSpite crew collate some of the best articles to have appeared on the website and publish them inside a nice collectable coffee book, and they're always worth purchasing. This particular book is the second volume in the website's annual roundup series (the team also release quarterly editions) and as such is brimming with a whole host of great articles about classic games and franchises that were published by the team between 2007-8, including the likes of *Shenmue*, *Street Fighter II* and *Gunstar Heroes*, with extra special attention paid to the *Metroid* and *Metal Gear* series. Better yet, if you're still unsure about whether or not you should make a purchase, GameSpite makes it as easy as possible to help you come to a decision by posting up a number of the articles on its website, basically giving you the opportunity to try before you buy and find out whether or not it'll be your cup of tea – though we'll bet Darran's spanking new iPad on the fact that it will be.

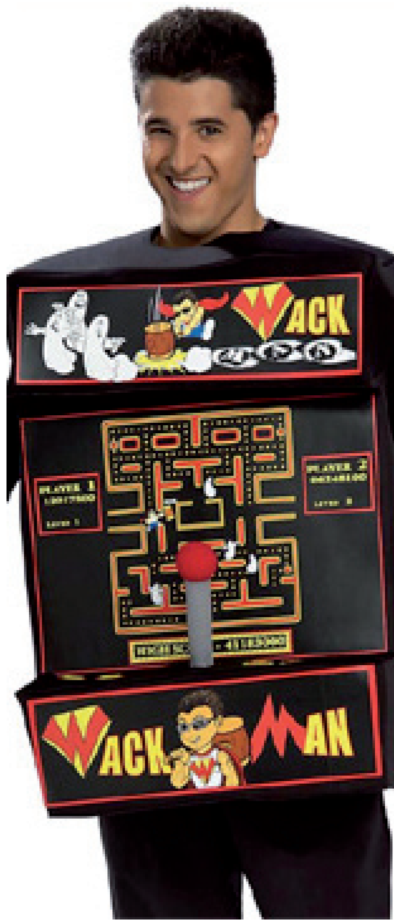




Coin-op fancy dress costume

■ **RRP:** £4.49
■ **Buy it from:** www.squareeyed.co.uk

Why not dress up as an arcade machine this Halloween? Although you do have to go as this odd-looking coin-op titled Wack Man, which seems to be a *Pac-Man* clone about Tom Cruise smashing ghosts with a mallet. Given the positioning of the joystick, you would've thought the manufacturers would've opted for lampooning a game that used a Trackball.





Pac-Man wristwatch

■ **RRP:** $129.99 **Buy it from:** www.clubnamco.com

More *Pac-Man* love this month comes courtesy of this official limited edition *Pac-Man* wristwatch, which shows the popular pill guzzler inside what can only be described as the easiest *Pac-Man* maze ever: a circle featuring a single ghost and eight power pellets. Given that it was *Pac-Man*'s 30th anniversary not so long ago, you might say that this item is quite timely.



Atari wristband

■ **RRP:** £4.49
■ **Buy it from:** www.squareeyed.co.uk

If you're looking for the perfect accessory to complement that pair of nut-hugging white shorts, Sergio Tacchini tracksuit top and VW badge chain as you stand posing in front of your bedroom mirror listening to Flock Of Seagulls (or was that just us?), then we have just the thing: an Atari wristband. It even comes in garish lime green too. Even better.

TOP FIVE T-SHIRTS



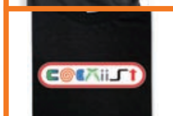
01 Gauntlet
■ **RRP:** £14.95
■ **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
■ **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com



02 Amstrad
■ **RRP:** £14.95
■ **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
■ **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com



03 Text Adventure
■ **RRP:** $14.95
■ **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
■ **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com



04 Coexist T-Shirt
■ **RRP:** $15.99 - $17.99
■ **Manufacturer:** Thinkgeek.com
■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com



05 Dizzy
■ **RRP:** £14.95
■ **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
■ **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com

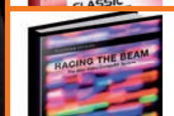
TOP FIVE BOOKS



01 Rogue Leaders: The Story Of LucasArts
■ **RRP:** £34.99 ■ **Publisher:** Titan Books
■ **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



02 Classic Home Video Games 1985-1988 ■ **RRP:** $55 (approx £34)
■ **Author:** Brett Weiss
■ **Buy it from:** www.amazon.com



03 Racing The Beam
■ **RRP:** £14.95
■ **Publisher:** MIT Press
■ **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



04 Game Over
■ **RRP:** £22.14
■ **Publisher:** Cyberactive Media Group
■ **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



05 Gamespite Quarterly: Issue 3
■ **RRP:** From $12 ■ **Author:** Jeremy Parish
■ **Buy it from:** www.gamespite.com

TOP FIVE MISCELLANEOUS



01 Pac-Man Hotplate Holder
■ **RRP:** $14.99 (approx £9)
■ **Manufacturer:** Namco
■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com



02 Tabletop Arcade Machine
■ **RRP:** Prices vary from £899-1,199
■ **Manufacturer:** Elite Gaming
■ **Buy it from:** www.elitegaming.org.uk



03 Space Invaders TV Game
■ **RRP:** £9.99 ■ **Manufacturer:** Radica
■ **Buy it from:** www.play.com



04 Headcrab Plushie
■ **RRP:** $24.99 (approx £16)
■ **Manufacturer:** Unknown
■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com



05 Namco Dioramas
■ **RRP:** £5
■ **Manufacturer:** Namco
■ **Buy it from:** www.japantrendshop.com



★ A MOMENT WITH...

Alex Towers

Each issue, we put an industry legend in the hotseat. This month, we have a chat with Alex Trowers, formerly of Bullfrog

Who is Alex Trowers?

Alex's first passion is games design. He started off his gaming career at Bullfrog where he quickly rose to the role of lead designer. He worked on numerous games including *Syndicate*, *Magic Carpet* and *Theme Park* and has since worked at Lost Toys, Kuju Entertainment and EA Bright Light.

Which of your games would you recommend to our readers and why?
I'd like to mention *Split/Second*, as it's from the last studio I worked at. It has jaw-dropping visuals and is the ideal game to show off your console with. If you like your racing games with a healthy dose of action and adrenaline, this is the way to go.

What is your proudest memory?
The single biggest kick you can get in this industry is when you go into a games store, see your game on the shelf and witness some kid pick it up and tell his mate: "Get this – it's awesome!" If I didn't need to pay bills or buy food, having people do that would be the only salary I'd ask for.

What's the most difficult thing you encounter while working on a game?
Innovation. Not the coming up of new ideas, but the fact that people tend to be scared by new things or things that they can't 'get'. This is almost always fatal to a project – especially if said person is further up the food chain than you are.

Which industry veteran do you admire the most?
I admire anyone who manages to get their name on the front of the box, especially in this day and age.

How would you like your games to be remembered?
As being fun. Simple as that. No one really remembers how well a game sold, but they sure remember if they enjoyed playing it.

Which game do you wish you'd made and why?
The designer in me says *Elite*. I'd never seen a game have that much of a social impact at school and be so different from anything else. My bank manager says either *Modern Warfare 2* or *WOW*.



» [Xbox 360] One of the last games Alex helped out on was *Split/Second: Velocity*. It's a superb arcade racer with plenty of spills and thrills.

What opportunities has working in the videogame industry given you?
Firstly, I've met some really interesting people. Through these people I've had some unforgettable experiences such as seeing in the Millennium on Hawaii or going for a ride in a McLaren F1. Secondly, I now get to go and lecture students on the finer points of game design. This combines my two passions of gaming and telling people what to do.

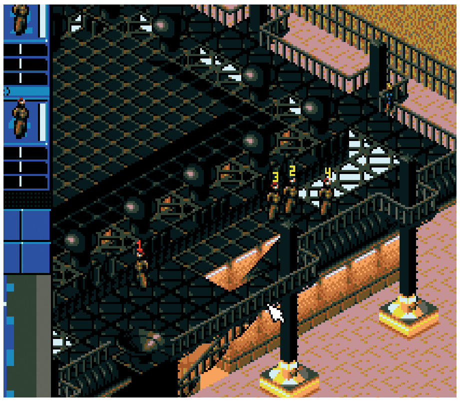
> "I admire anyone who gets their name on the front of the box"



What's your darkest memory of being in the videogame industry?
Crunch. On *Gene Wars* we had a rough time. The game was redesigned several times over and, with no real end in sight we'd often work 48 hours non-stop.

And your best?
The development of *Syndicate*. It was so awesome. We'd gather our mates after a night at the pub and all rock up back at the office for a multiplayer play session. These sessions were so much fun that we'd rarely realise it had got light outside.

How has the industry changed in the last 20 years?
An incredible amount. It's gone from being about the ideas and gameplay and is now firmly about the money and technology. The games aren't called games any more – they're 'products' or 'franchises'. The flip side of this is that gaming has become more and more accepted as a pastime. ★



» [Amiga] *Syndicate* remains one of the best games in Bullfrog's impressive library. It's also one that Alex has the fondest memories of.



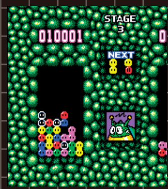
retrodiary

23 July – 19 August

>> A month of retro events both past and present



23 July 1998
■ Japan welcomes the Sega Saturn release of Treasure's vertical scrolling shooter, the splendid *Radiant Silvergun*.



26 July 1994
■ The Sonic spin-off game, *Dr Robotnik's Mean Bean Machine*, is belatedly released in Europe on the Sega Master System.



27 July 2007
■ *Pokémon Diamond* for the Nintendo DS is released across Europe.



27 July 2003
■ The Game Boy Advance gets its own version of *Crazy Taxi* with the release of *Catch A Ride* in the UK.



31 July 2009
■ Guybrush Threepwood returns in *Tales Of Monkey Island*, a five-part episodic adventure, available through WiiWare in Europe.



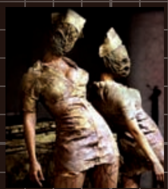
31 July 1995
■ Sierra On-Line releases its interactive horror game, *Phantasmagoria*, on PC in the USA. Many retailers refuse to sell it.



30 July 1940
■ Sir Clive Marles Sinclair is born. Just 42 short years to wait until the ZX Spectrum, then…



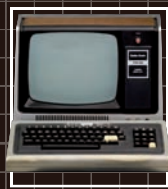
28 July 2009
■ The SNK fighting franchise continues when *King Of Fighters XII* is released worldwide on Xbox 360 and PS3.



1 August 1999
■ The horror survival gaming franchise of *Silent Hill* begins with its UK release debuting on the PlayStation. Nurse!



1 August 2008
■ *Soul Calibur IV* is released in the UK on PS3 and Xbox 360 with Darth Vader and Yoda making guest appearances.



3 August 1977
■ Tandy announces it is releasing an entry-level home micro, the TRS-80, in the US. It hits the shops in December.



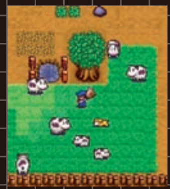
4 August 1983
■ The Sinclair Microdrive is released almost a year and a half after Sir Clive promised it would be available "very soon".



11 August 1993
■ The terrific fighting game from SNK, *Samurai Spirits /Samurai Shodown* (depending where you live), is released on the Neo Geo AES.



11 August 1983
■ Elan announces it is developing two new home micros, the Enterprise 64 and 128. Just don't hold your breath waiting for them to arrive…



9 August 1996
■ The first in the series of farming simulations, *Harvest Moon*, is released in Japan on the Super Famicom. No swine flu here presumably…



9 August 1982
■ Commodore International officially releases its Commodore 64 in the USA at a price of $595. It becomes the best-selling home computer of all time.



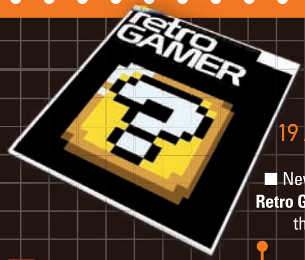
12-15 August 2010
■ Quake fans get yourself to QuakeCon in Texas, USA for what is described as the Woodstock of gaming.



13 August 2004
■ *Doom 3*, the latest instalment of the first-person shooter classic, is released in the UK on PC.



14 August 1989
■ Sega finally begins selling its eagerly anticipated Sega Genesis games console in the USA.



19 August 2010
■ New issue of **Retro Gamer** hits the streets.

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES

CHARTS

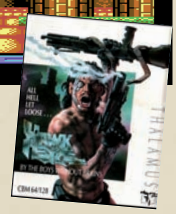


AUGUST 1988

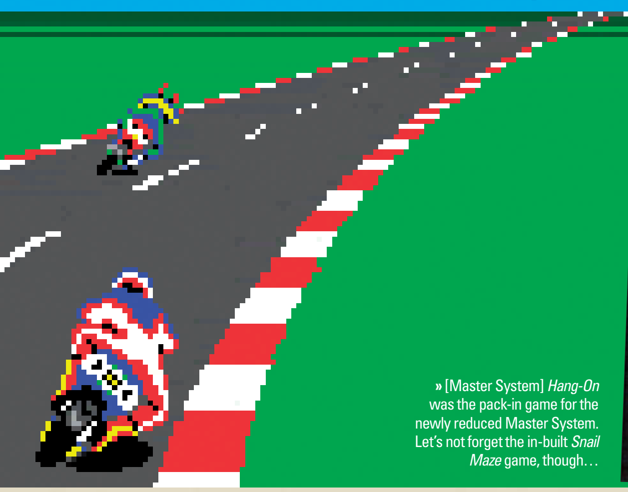
SPECTRUM

1. Target Renegade (Imagine)
2. OutRun (US Gold)
3. Ghostbusters (Ricochet)
4. We Are The Champions (Ocean)
5. Steve Davis Snooker (Blue Ribbon)





» [Commodore 64] *Hawkeye* was awarded a Gold Medal and 96% by *Zzap!64*. Dodgy dealings? Nope, it was superb.





» [Master System] *Hang-On* was the pack-in game for the newly reduced Master System. Let's not forget the in-built *Snail Maze* game, though…



THE LATEST NEWS FROM AUGUST 1988

AUGUST 1988 – Play it again SAM, Sega Hang-On and reduces, Sinclair engineers show some Flare, Operation Wolf and a Daley challenge from Ocean, Gremlin goes munching while chess gets a whole lot meaner. Richard Burton still prefers Ker-Plunk…

The SAM Coupé from Miles Gordon Technology was due for release this month. With its launch price initially set at £99 and packed with a host of features including a Spectrum emulation mode, the interest surrounding the SAM Coupé was building.

Unfortunately more setbacks put the release back by another six months. A shortage of memory chips didn't help production but the peculiar decision to release the SAM in February rather than pre-Christmas because it was a "quieter period" seemed downright odd. MGT also wanted time to develop its marketing by getting the SAM into the high street shortly after release rather than continuing with its mail-order-only practice.

So, SAM is going to be late, with the upshot being that the launch price looks to be nearer £149. More worryingly for MGT, though, is the question of whether there will actually be a demand in six months' time, such is the progression of consoles and home micros and their price reductions.

This was emphasised nicely with news that Sega was reducing the price of the Master System console to £79.95. Sega's arcade conversion of *Hang-On* would come with the package and there would also be an option to upgrade to the £129.95 setup, which would include the light phaser, 3D glasses, *Missile Defence 3D* game and *Safari Hunt*.

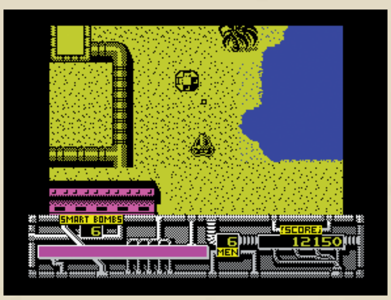
There were also tantalising titbits of information oozing from Flare Technology regarding a new 8-bit machine that it was working on, which, according to its specifications, would compare favourably to the Atari ST and Amiga.

Flare Technology, a company formed by three former Sinclair Research engineers, was working on the Flare One, built exclusively to be a games machine. The motherboard was developing nicely, with several custom-built silicon chips incorporated into the design as well as a distinctly 16-bit blitter chip.

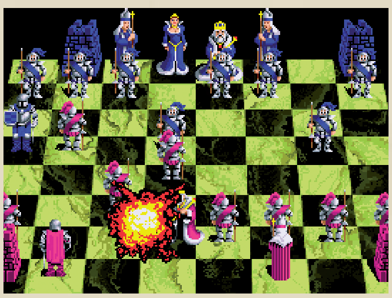
The power of the board was undeniable and the system looked to be something quite special. However, having designed and created a quite awesome motherboard with the limited resources that it was working with, the next step – manufacture and production of the proposed £200 machine – was beyond its means.

Amstrad and others were rumoured to be taking an interest, but nothing ever developed. The established names were understandably committed to ensuring that their own machines were suitably catered for, so introducing a new super 8-bit machine into the mix could upset their finely balanced strategies. It was also mooted that the sums of money required to get the Flare One to the marketplace could cost as much as £10 million.

Ultimately the Flare One home micro/console faded away, although the chipset was set to be used in the abortive Konix



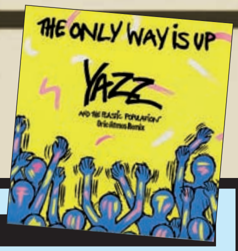
» [Spectrum] Another classy shoot-'em-up from Hewson. Although not as intense as *Cybernoid*, it was a polished game.



» [Amiga] Bishop to Knight Five. Horsie takes King Prawn… Let's get ready to rumble…







AMSTRAD

1. Yogi Bear (Alternative)
2. Super Stuntman (Codemasters)
3. Steve Davis Snooker (Blue Ribbon)
4. Ace (Cascade)
5. Fruit Machine Simulator (Codemasters)

COMMODORE 64

1. Ace (Cascade)
2. Steve Davis Snooker (Blue Ribbon)
3. Ghostbusters (Ricochet)
4. Alien Syndrome (Ace)
5. Trap Door (Alternative)

MUSIC

1. The Only Way Is Up (Yazz and the Plastic Population)
2. The Loco-Motion (Kylie Minogue)
3. I Need You (BVSMP)
4. The Harder I Try (Brother Beyond)
5. You Came (Kim Wilde)

Multisystem console and also used in several arcade machines.

Ocean Software had an interesting selection of games coming out this month. To coincide with the Seoul Olympics there was *Daley Thompson's Olympic Challenge*, complete with in-game sponsorship from Adidas and Lucozade. The company also had a trio of arcade shoot-'em-up conversions due for release, starting with the impressive *Operation Wolf* looking to be the pick of the three. (Uzi not included.)

The remaining two conversions – *Typhoon* and *The Vindicator*, a sequel to *Green Beret* – would both appear on Ocean's Imagine label. All titles were being released on all the major home computers within the next three months.

Continuing along the sponsored game theme, Gremlin Graphics announced its latest offering: *T-Wrecks*, a monster mash-'em-up in the vein of *Rampage*. Although early previews kept with the original name, when the Spectrum and C64 versions were released the game's name had morphed into *The Muncher* thanks to a tie-in with Chewits and the confectionary-scoffing dinosaur advertisement that it was running. The game itself was okay; not stunning but certainly playable, and it contained some very effective graphics, particularly the huge main dinosaur character.

If your gaming tendencies sway towards the grey matter yet you still occasionally yearn for some mindless violence, *Battle Chess* could be the very thing. Developed by Interplay for Electronic Arts, it was a conventional game of chess with the added bonus of your pieces coming to life when an opponent's piece is taken. They amble over and destroy the piece in a typically medieval fashion and return to a dormant state in readiness for the next move.

Yes, a bit gimmicky, but it worked quite well, and among the slew of arcade games, consoles and shoot-'em-ups it was nice to see a traditional board game being tweaked for a new audience. It would be out for the Amiga within a month, with a PC version hitting the shops shortly before Christmas.

It was the final issue of Database Publications magazine *Computing With The Amstrad* before its name change to *CPC Computing*. It also meant a permanent goodbye to the surviving bits of *Amtix*, with its last ever Accolade going to *Karnov* (Mediagenic/Data East).

Crash once again had a lean supply of Smashes this month with just three, one of which was never released: *The Great Giana Sisters* (Rainbow Arts), *Marauder* (Hewson) and *Stalingrad* (CCS).

Sister publication *Zzap!64* fared little better, with *Barbarian II* (Palace Software) and *Hawkeye* (Thalamus) sharing the Gold Medal award and *Dark Side* (Incentive) getting Sizzled all by itself. *Bruce Lee* (Americana) picked up a Silver Medal.

Amstrad fans found quality gaming thin on the ground in *Amstrad Action*, with the Mastergame, *Target Renegade* (Imagine), and one Rave, *Arctic Fox* (Electronic Arts) the only games of note this month.



» [Commodore 64] From *T-Wrecks* to *The Muncher*. Chewits are even chewier than Barrow-in-Furness's bus depot…



» [Amstrad] *Operation Wolf* was challenging and a good conversion of the arcade original.

THIS MONTH IN…



ACE

ACE's 'Games For Programmers' feature took a selection of top coders and asked where they found inspiration, what they look for in games, and what they load up at the end of a hard day's coding. Ultimate's *Knight Lore* seemed to be the game they all looked up to.





THE GAMES MACHINE

TGM interviewed Mike Sutin, director of *The Kristal*, a new 16-bit game that Sutin himself called "the biggest game ever". Strangely, it started as an aborted 1976 comedy stage musical called *The Kristal Of Konos*.



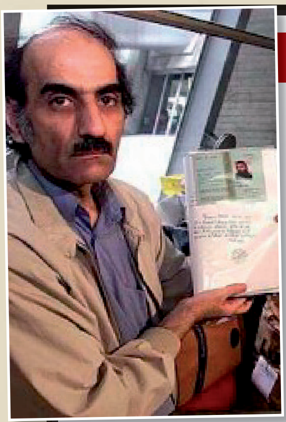


CRASH

The trend for programmers' diaries continued, with Raffaele Cecco revealing his progress on *Stormlord* and *Cybernoid 2*. Cecco had to get a demo of *Stormlord* ready for preview at Hewson by the company's well-regarded games critic, Paul Chamberlain.



AUGUST 1988 NEWS



» Shave the 'tache, squint a bit and it could, just could, be Tom Hanks…

28 August saw the worst ever air-show disaster at the Ramstein Air Base in Germany. A crowd of over 350,000 people gathered for the event, which culminated in a display of formation flying by the Frecce Tricolori, a team from the Italian Air Force.

During a difficult manoeuvre three jets collided, resulting in two of them crashing into a runway and exploding. The third jet crashed and tumbled into the spectators. Shrapnel from the jet killed many but the plane's kerosene fuel created an enormous fireball, engulfing spectators. 70 people died, with 450 others sustaining serious injuries.

8 August marked the beginning of Mehran Karimi Nasseri's extended stay at Terminal One of Charles de Gaulle airport. He had been expelled from Iran in 1977 and granted refugee status by the United Nations, allowing him to reside in any European country. En route to the UK his briefcase and papers were stolen, and without any official documents was promptly returned to France where he was arrested.

He was not allowed to enter the country and, being a refugee, he had no country to be returned to. So Terminal One became his home from August 1988 until July 2006. It's thought that the 2004 Spielberg movie starring Tom Hanks, *The Terminal*, was inspired by Nasseri's story.



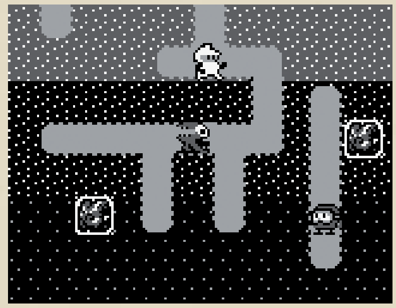
» Spectacular stunts led to equally spectacular death and destruction.

BACK TO THE NINETIES



» [Commodore 64] *Mayhem In Monsterland* was simply one of the greatest games to ever grace the C64.

» [Game Boy] Monochromatic *Dig Dug* appears on the Game Boy, and it's as good as ever.



» [Amiga] *Goal!* was superb, while *Kick Off 3* was a gaming turd of the highest order.





THE LATEST NEWS FROM FEBRUARY 1993

FEBRUARY 1993 – a second squeeze of Lemmings, Mayhem is coming to Monsterland, 3DO is set to go, Cheetos cheesy tie-in, SF II for the NES while Goal! toe punts Kick Off 3 into row Z. Richard Burton takes the standing leg out…

The sequel to *Lemmings* was overdue but Psygnosis finally announced that *Lemmings 2: The Tribes* was ready for the Amiga and ST. Was it worth the wait?

Firstly, it had a storyline. The original rescued lemmings have been shipped off to Lemming Island and have separated into 12 distinct tribes such as medieval and Egyptian, each owning a piece of their magical talisman. With these new tribes comes new skills, 52 in all, with some unique to individual tribes.

With a great darkness ready to consume the land, you must guide the tribes through the 12 lands, each with ten different levels, and you must guide at least one lemming from each of the tribes to safety, as all saved lemmings are now carried over to the next level and, depending on your success, a gold, silver or bronze medal is awarded at the end of each stage and a piece of talisman is obtained.

Once all 12 pieces are reunited, the lemmings can escape the island on the flying ark. With a plot, numerous new skills and differing levels of success, *Lemmings 2* would prove to be a significant improvement over the original, and that would be reflected in the sales figures.

They were known as Apex Computer Productions, created *Creatures* by Thalamus, and are called Steve and John Rowland. They had also just given us an update on how their C64-only platform game, *Mayhem In Monsterland*, was progressing. Although work on it seemed painstakingly slow from their updates detailed in *Commodore Format* magazine, what we saw forming did appear be something exceptional.

All separate parts of the game looked superb – the graphics looked pretty, the sound was great, it was very playable, and everything moved delightfully quickly – but would the sum of its parts match everyone's lofty expectations? Yes.

There were inklings from several sources of an exciting new games console under development by The 3DO Company, created by Electronic Arts founder Trip Hawkins. The proposed 3DO system would be the first 32-bit console and be marketed as an entertainment system in an attempt to capture some of the audio-visual market, such was the power of the machine. Although engineered by The 3DO Company, it would be initially manufactured by Panasonic.

It was reportedly going to be launched in America in early autumn, although no official price point had been specified. Had the company mentioned that it was going to be $700 at launch, it may have got an advance indication of how well it was going to sell: not very.

Hot on the trail of McDonald's and its recent game tie-in *McDonaldland* was Chester Cheetah, the mascot of the cheesy flavoured snack produced by Frito-Lay in the US and marketed in the UK by Walkers.



» [Mega Drive] *Gemfire* was an interesting turn-based strategy game, which saw you unify a divided island with brute force.



» [Amiga] The lemmings were back and the game had evolved into something more playable and enjoyable.

FEBRUARY 1993 NEWS



» Terrorists attack the World Trade Center. A sign of things to come…

12 February was the day when two-year-old toddler James Bulger was abducted from The Strand Shopping Centre in Bootle, Liverpool. Two days later his badly mutilated body was found on a nearby railway embankment.

CCTV footage showed the toddler being led away from the shopping complex by two young boys. Shockingly, it emerged that the two boys, Jon Venables and Robert Thompson, both aged just ten, were responsible for Bulger's abduction and brutal murder and were charged on 20 February. It took until November 1993 for them to be convicted of murder, with both receiving just eight years for their crime. They were released in June 2001 with new identities.

26 February saw the World Trade Center in New York City suffer a terrorist attack. A 1,500-pound car bomb was detonated in the underground car park of the North Tower, with the intention of destroying the foundations and toppling the building.

The blast created a 100 foot by 200 foot crater, killing six people and injuring over a thousand more, mostly from the evacuation of the towers as smoke billowed up through the floors. A lack of electricity for the elevators and, shockingly, emergency lighting hindered the evacuation and led to more injuries.

One eyewitness, 34-year-old broker Bruce Pomper, was quoted as saying: "It felt like an airplane had hit the building." Not a good omen…



» The 3DO looked good, sounded good and was indeed very good. Then the price tag came into play…

Published by Kaneko, *Chester Cheetah: Too Cool To Fool* was another in a long line of platform games. It was all very formulaic, graphically dull, and gameplay-wise wasn't much better. To get an idea of how the game fared, just eat a bag of Cheetos then sniff your hand afterwards. Man, that's one ripe finger…

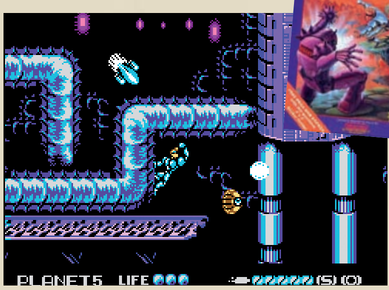
It was released on the SNES and Genesis in America and was pencilled in for a UK release. Thankfully, it was pulled before contaminating our shores. Incredibly, a second game, *Chester Cheetah: Wild West Quest*, followed, and, staggeringly, it was worse than the original.

Capcom's *Street Fighter II* was still raking in the money on the SNES, so rumours began that it was going to milk the cash cow a little bit more with a NES version. If would be interesting to see, from a technical standpoint, what Nintendo's lesser machine could do with *Street Fighter II*…

Well, the answer was nothing. The rumour never developed into anything more than wishful thinking, and the *Street Fighter* franchise remained woefully absent from the NES console.

Well, apart from *Street Fighter 2010*, a side-scrolling shoot-'em-up affair, in which Ken has become a scientist with bionic powers thanks to a compound developed in his laboratory. It was an absurd game that left a stain on the *Street Fighter* series that even industrial strength Cillit Bang wouldn't shift.





» [NES] It's called *Street Fighter* and features a future Ken, but this dubious shoot-'em-up platform effort was disheartening stuff.

Dino Dini, the talent behind Anco's football game *Kick Off*, handed in a transfer request after disagreements and moved to Virgin Games, taking his current project, *Kick Off 3*, with him. Of course, Anco still held the rights to the name, so it was renamed *Goal!* and was Virgin's answer to *Sensible Soccer*, pushing it closely for the title of best Amiga football game.

Meanwhile, Anco persevered with *Kick Off* and employed the co-designer of the original, Steve Screech, to create the third instalment. He did and it was hopeless.

Mean Machines Sega avoided doling out awards, instead plumping for percentages. The highest this month were *Super Kick-Off* (US Gold, Mega Drive), *Gemfire* (Koei, Mega Drive), *Defenders Of Oasis* (Sega, Game Gear) and *Alien 3* (Arena, Game Gear).

Nintendo Magazine System also went for the percentage system, with the top scorers being *Dig Dug* (Namco, Game Boy), *Lethal Weapon* (Ocean, SNES), *On The Ball* (Taito, SNES), *Super Star Wars* (LucasArts/JVC, SNES), *Bionic Commando* (Capcom, Game Boy), *Cybernator* (Konami, SNES), *Super NBA Basketball* (Tecmo, SNES) and *Drop Zone* (Game Boy).

THIS MONTH IN…

COMMODORE FORMAT



'Face To Face' was a feature where readers sent in questions to ask industry figures. This month was the turn of David Darling from Codemasters. Apparently he would like to go to Venezuela and *Treasure Island Dizzy* sold over 500,000 copies. Nice.



SUPER PLAY



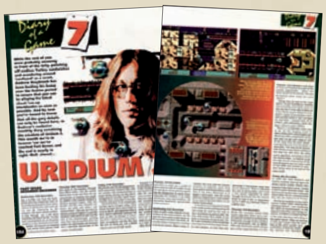
Super Play ran an interesting feature on custom-built cartridge-mounted chips for SNES games, highlighting what was already available and what was forthcoming. Coming soon was the exciting Super FX chip from Argonaut Games, which also helped create *Star Fox*.



THE ONE AMIGA



Andrew Braybrook's *Uridium 2* diary yielded one moment of relief. How many graphics artists does it take to change a light bulb? One, but you have to impress on him the importance of not changing it at all; it's really good as it is. Hmm…



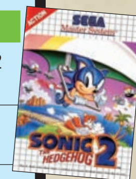
CHARTS

FEBRUARY 1993



MEGA DRIVE

1. Sonic The Hedgehog 2 (Sega)
2. European Club Soccer (Virgin Games)
3. LHX Attack Chopper (Electronic Arts)
4. Alien 3 (Arena Entertainment)
5. Taz Mania (Sega)



MASTER SYSTEM

1. Sonic The Hedgehog 2 (Sega)
2. Sonic The Hedgehog (Sega)
3. Enduro Racer (Sega)
4. Prince Of Persia (Domark)
5. Asterix (Sega)

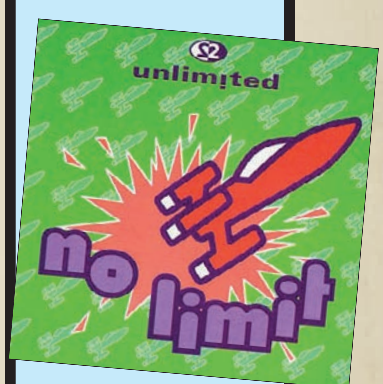


GAME BOY

1. Super Mario Land (Nintendo)
2. Super Mario Land 2 (Nintendo)
3. Kirby's Dream Land (Nintendo)
4. Looney Tunes (Sunsoft)
5. Battletoads (Tradewest/Rare)

MUSIC

1. No Limit (2 Unlimited)
2. Little Bird / Love Song For A Vampire (Annie Lennox)
3. Why Can't I Wake Up With You (Take That)
4. I Will Always Love You (Whitney Houston)
5. Deep (East 17)




HIGH SCORE
20000
4700



Dig Dug II

FUN IN SPADES… THIS TIME WITHOUT THE SPADE

#27

» ARCADE
» NAMCO
» 1985

When the original *Dig Dug* was released in 1982, it was a fairly big hit for Namco. True, it was no *Pac-Man*, but it was a popular title nevertheless. Like all timeless games, it featured a simple premise, but it was also addictive and well executed.

Dig Dug's sequel, released three years after his first adventure, was a commercial failure. It wasn't awful – indeed, as a standalone it was a perfectly acceptable game – but it was far too often compared to its predecessor. The truth is they were different games.

While, on one hand, the original was a subterranean and rather claustrophobic experience (which made it ever more exhilarating), *Dig Dug II* took place above ground. In order to add an extra dimension to the gameplay – just as the digging, dead ends and falling rocks had done in the original – the game allows you to drill away at pieces of the land mass (the gameplay takes place on islands), causing them to collapse into the ocean. Just as it's possible to dig yourself into a dead end in *Dig Dug*, *Dig Dug II* requires the player to pay close attention to their surroundings; otherwise they could end up drilling away the land they're standing on, which is never a good idea.

Dig Dug II has just as much depth as the original and far better visuals, but it lacks the pressure of the original. The overground setting makes the game easier, as you're not slowed down by shovelling dirt, and enemies can't slip through dirt unnoticed as mere pairs of eyes, to corner you, as so often happened in *Dig Dug*. In the sequel, everything can be seen, and it removes a large portion of the fun that the original possessed.

Dig Dug II isn't a bad game. And I reckon the main reason for it being a commercial flop was the three-year gap between the two releases, by which time arcade players had likely all-but forgotten about *Dig Dug* in favour of games like *Gradius*.

Only now, with the emergence of retro games into the mainstream through endless compilations and revivals, is *Dig Dug II* being rediscovered as what it is: a decent game. *

RETROBATE PROFILE

» **NAME:** STARVING HORACE
» **JOINED:** 29 NOVEMBER 2009
» **LOCATION:** NOT GIVEN
» **OCCUPATION:** NOT GIVEN
» **FAVE GAME SYSTEM:** ZX SPECTRUM

Want to appear in the magazine? Be sure to upload your classic profiles at www.retrogamer.net

#01 Rainbow Islands



Instant Expert

The full, unedited title for the game is *Rainbow Islands: The Story Of Bubble Bobble 2*.

The story and game design is credited to programmer Fukio Mitsuji. He also designed the characters Bub and Bob.

Released in arcades in 1988, *Rainbow Islands Extra* was a more challenging version of the game. It was ported to the FM Towns and included in the Mega Drive *Rainbow Islands* port, where it was aptly christened 'Extra mode'.

Since its release, *Rainbow Islands* has been ported to 15 machines.

If the game's music sounds familiar, that's because it's a bleeping rendition of *Over The Rainbow*.

A bootleg of *Rainbow Islands* was released in 1989. Titled *Jumping*, it replaces rainbows with multicoloured stars, alters the names of the islands, and changes the look of Bubby and Bobby.

The original *Bubble Bobble* featured simultaneous two-player co-op. In *Rainbow Islands*, however, players had to take turns.

While the enemies in *Rainbow Islands* all look cute, they are *Bubble Bobble* enemies in disguise. Pick up a crystal ball and they reveal their true form.

In a brand new series, **Retro Gamer** gives you all the info you'll ever need on the most iconic retro games ever made. This month we take you through Taito's classic Rainbow Islands: The Story Of Bubble Bobble 2

Imaginative character designs, simultaneous two-player co-op, a torrent of secrets, and secret endings all made *Bubble Bobble* an instant hit when it was released in arcades over 20 years ago. But when a sequel surfaced a year later, reaction to it was mixed. The reason? Well, on initial inspection the game seemed to be an entirely different beast. The sequel dropped its single-screen platforming roots, replacing them with vertical scrolling stages instead, and the game's heroes, Bub and Bob, appeared in their boyish forms (Bubby and Bobby) – confusing for anyone who didn't finish the first game and thus witness the twins get transformed back into boys. The game also dropped the original attack mechanic. *Bubble Bobble* saw Bub and Bob trap their enemies inside bubbles, but for the sequel Taito substituted this good-natured attack for a new, slightly more sophisticated one. The brothers could now fire rainbow-producing stars capable of killing enemies if they strayed into their line of creation, yet these colourful arcs also acted as handy barriers and bridges to help the twins ascend the stages and complete their mission.

While this was one of the most sophisticated game mechanics to be baked into a platform game at the time, the rainbow attack, colourful saccharine aesthetics of the game and its jaunty remix of *Over The Rainbow* had many assuming that *Rainbow Islands* was aimed squarely at kids. However, those cute and colourful visuals actually belie one of the most challenging platformers ever created. *Rainbow Islands* is an arduous multiple peak challenge that is primed with dangers at every turn, and requires real skill to finish definitively. It's a game that has something to offer to both the casual and the hardcore.

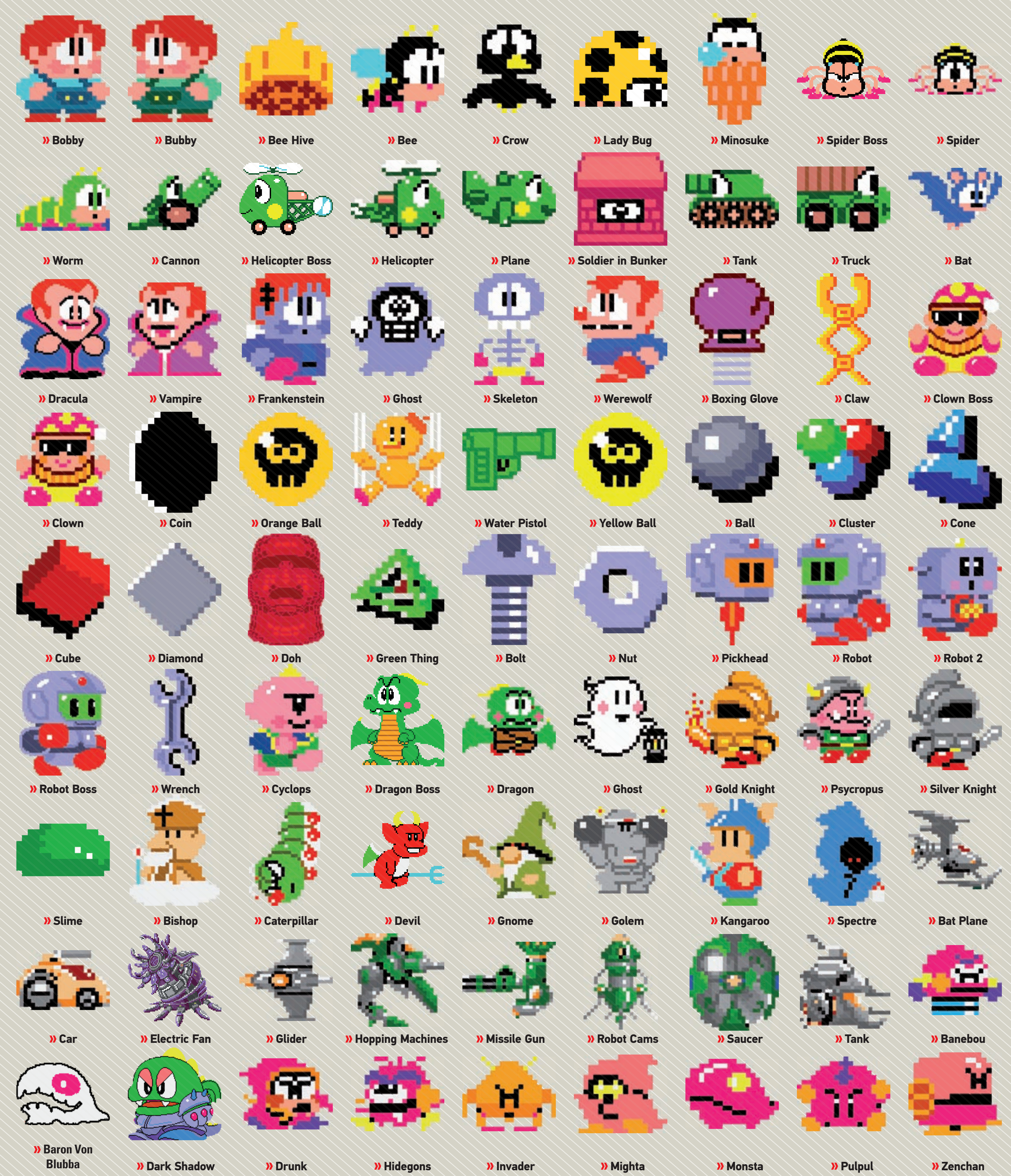
Why we believe that *Rainbow Islands* can be deemed a true classic, though, is because Taito dared to try something fresh with the series. It offered fans the very same elements that made *Bubble Bobble* so special – except for two-player co-op – without simply churning out another 100 levels and slapping a '2' onto its arcade cabinet – which, let's face it, would suffice and have been far less hassle. Instead, it tried to create a sequel in the best sense: a continuation of the story that took the best bits from the original game but set them inside a new world with new rules and mechanics to discover and master.

The Adventure Begins

We've already stated that the story behind the *Bubble Bobble* series is a little befuddling, so allow us to place a soothing flannel on your head and relay *Rainbow Islands*' story to set the scene. At the end of *Bubble Bobble*, Bub and Bob successfully defeat Super Drunk – who is actually an evil manifestation of their parents – and rescue their girlfriends, Patty and Betty. For their troubles, the duo are transformed back into their human forms and their parents

Pixel Perfect

Your guide to the characters of Rainbow Islands. How many have you seen?



Critical Reception

What the gaming press thought…



"Finishing Rainbow Islands is like scoring the winning goal in a cup final. It's beyond criticism"

- **AMIGA POWER** 1992

Twin Galaxies High Scores

MAME [NEW VERSION]
- **NAME:** JULIEN DELANTES
- **POINTS:** 71,000,590

C64
- **NAME:** JORDI SCHOUTEREN
- **POINTS:** 957,310

NES
- **NAME:** RYAN W JOHNSON
- **POINTS:** 1,248,300

PSONE
- **NAME:** GRACE A SCHLADER
- **POINTS:** 3,803,870

reward them with a fancy new power that allows them to create rainbows at will. Flash forward a few years and the twins decide to set off to their birthplace to do a spot of treasure hunting, but later decide to tie in the gold digging with trying to defeat the person responsible for brainwashing their parents and stealing their girls: the evil Dark Shadow. In a shock twist, during the final fight Dark Shadow reveals himself to be *Bubble Bobble*'s time-keeping spectre Baron Von Blubba (aka Skel-Monsta). Look, we did say it was confusing.



A Spectrum of Secrets

As well as a bewildering story, *Rainbow Islands* is famous for its overabundance of secrets. To see the 'True and Happy' ending to the game the player must collect the seven multicoloured gems on each island – gems are generally awarded for killing enemies by crushing them underneath rainbows. Do this, and the player is awarded a giant gem upon completion of that island. Once all seven are collected, a further three 'secret' islands appear on the world map. The player must then retrieve three magical mirrors – achieved by collecting the seven gems on each island as before – and reach and defeat the final boss, Dark Shadow, in one continue. Lose all your lives on any of the secret islands and it's an instant game over.



Extremely tricky to do, but if you can also collect the seven small diamonds in the correct order – red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet – not only will you receive a big diamond to bank towards your ticket to the final three islands, but you also gain access to a secret doorway when you reach the end of the stage. This doorway allows you to exit into a secret room and complete the island without having to fight the boss.



One of the other advantages of gaining access to the secret rooms is that inside you will find big versions of the standard power-ups. Why are they big? It's because their powers stay with the twins even after they die. So if you grab yourself a giant bottle of red potion, double-barrelled rainbow fire is yours for the rest of the game – on the proviso, of course, that you keep pumping money into the machine. Also, these rooms reveal handy cheat codes that grant the player a perk when inputted into the game's title screen. Examples include permanent speed, double and triple rainbows, and also hints to other secrets hidden in the game.

As well as the standard power-ups, *Rainbow Islands* featured a wealth of special items to discover. Bubby and Bobby can collect rings for points, tiaras to increase their attacks, staffs that award them bonus items for stomping on their rainbows, and lamps that give them either bonus points or maximum rainbow power. And there's a whole bunch of rare items too, ranging from feathers that give the twins a helpful fairy minder to a handy invincibility cape.

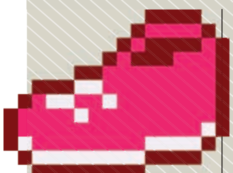
As you can see, Taito crammed a lot into *Rainbow Islands*, which is why we decided that it would make the perfect candidate for our first Ultimate Guide.



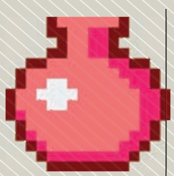
» [Arcade] Only when all seven gems have been collected can the world truly be considered completed.

Power-ups

Here's a complete rundown of the main power-ups that appear in the game, and their effects



» Running Shoes
We'll give you one guess.



» Red Potion
Gives rainbow attacks further reach. Two bottles is your limit.



» Yellow Potion
Increases the speed at which rainbows can be fired.



» Yellow Star
When touched will fire stars into the air to destroy anything that they contact.



» Crystal Ball
Enemies will reveal their true, uglier guises when hit: *Bubble Bobble* enemies.



» Red Star
Similar to the yellow star, except it fires stars up and below.

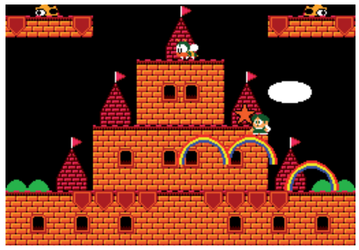
The Conversions

We play through some of the best conversions of the game and give you our opinion of each

Sega Mega Drive

A decent conversion that boasts two versions of the game: Original and Extra mode. The latter is a port of *Rainbow Islands Extra*, a slightly altered version of the game released in arcades that jumbles up the enemies and stages.





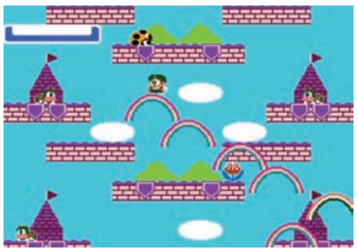
Sega Master System

The SMS version is an oddity. It features different levels, caps you at two rainbows, and features cut-scenes between stages. It also looks ugly, is sluggish to play, scrolls weirdly and flickers too. It's an entirely different game, basically.



NES (European version)

The graphics look washed out, the collision detection is iffy, the music is different and gameplay is sluggish. That said, it features respawning enemies, making it easy to obtain gems, and gives you a silly number of continues.



NES (US and Japanese version)

There exist two versions of *Rainbow Islands* on the NES: the acceptable version by Ocean (not Graftgold) and this dire conversion by Taito. This is essentially just the weird SMS version of the game, but even uglier. Avoid at all costs.



PC Engine CD

This is a faithful conversion in every respect, boasting the best visuals, music and gameplay around. It's also the only home conversion to feature the three secret islands, and a cool end credits song. The definitive conversion.



Atari ST

There's not much separating this fantastic version from the Amiga port. It features big, chunky arcade visuals, slick gameplay and great music. This is yet another tip-top conversion by Graftgold.



Amiga

A truly fantastic 16-bit conversion of the game that looks great and plays brilliantly. Our only gripe is the black borders that frame the action. Other than that, this is one of the best conversions that you can find.



Amstrad CPC

It might look the part, but the Arnold struggles to replicate the slick gameplay of its rivals. This is another sluggish version, similar to the NES port. Save for the PC Engine, though, this is the best-looking 8-bit port.



Commodore 64

It is prone to the odd bout of flickering when things get busy on screen, but this is unarguably the best version on all the micros. This is a colourful and slick port of the arcade game that still impresses today.



Spectrum

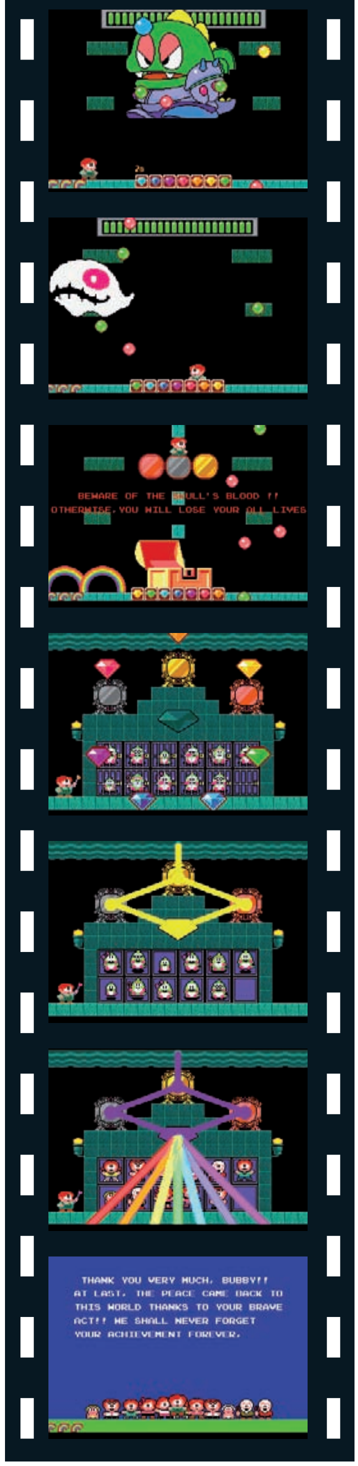
Given that *Rainbow Islands* is one of the most colourful games ever, you'd think the transition to the Spectrum would be a messy one. Not so. This is another top effort. It's very colourful, extremely smooth and surprisingly faithful.



Game Boy Color

The only version to feature side-scrolling, as the levels don't fit the Game Boy's display, and allow you to decide the order in which you tackle the islands. It also features time and score attack modes. Sadly, it's marred by woolly controls.

Getting to see the 'good' ending to Rainbow Islands is no mean feat. Thankfully we're at hand to help fill in the blanks and show you how this epic adventure ends.



The Rainbow Islands Tour

There are a total of ten islands to work through in *Rainbow Islands*: seven you get just for sticking a credit into it and pressing the start button, and a bonus three 'secret' islands are yours for collecting the seven big diamonds of each main island. They're divided into four stages, and each requires the player to work their way from the bottom to the very top of the stage. Awaiting them at the top is either a giant chest filled with treasures, or, at the end of every fourth stage, a boss to tackle. Here's our indispensable guide to each island and its respective boss, just in case you ever plan on revisiting one day.

9 Darius Island

Exposing perfectly how impossibly cute *Rainbow Islands* can be, this level smashes together the worlds of *Bubble Bobble* and Taito shooter *Darius*. It features all sorts of biomechanical enemies for the twins to avoid – including gun emplacements, tanks and spaceships. They may be from the future, but they prove no match against rainbow-firing toddlers.

Boss: Electric Fan



The final boss on this stage is the electric fan/sea anemone from the second stage of *Darius*. As a nice little touch, this confrontation even displays the iconic 'Warning: A Huge Battleship Is Approaching Fast' message before the fight. This boss attacks using a combination of laser beams and launching a fleet of kamikaze attack ships.

Difficulty rating:

10 Bubble Island

Those fans who felt that *Rainbow Islands* was lacking in enough *Bubble Bobble* elements should be pleased to hear that Taito tries to redress the balance in the game's final stage. The final island ditches the cute facade and shows the baddies of *Rainbow Islands* in their true form: *Bubble Bobble* enemies.

Boss: Dark Shadow



The game's final boss, Dark Shadow, is a giant *Bubble Bobble* dinosaur that attacks using bubbles – quite amiable of him, really. Anyway, when he's beaten he changes into a super giant version of Baron Von Blubba – oddly, another of Taito's time limit autocrats.

Difficulty rating:



2 Combat Island

Surprisingly, despite many of its inhabitants being armed to the teeth, this island doesn't serve up too much attrition to visitors. The enemies here are not dissimilar to those in the first stage – they follow simple, easy to work out attack patterns. Be wary of the 'copters and not getting caught beneath the bombs that they drop.

Boss: Helicopter Boss



This giant chopper flies left to right dropping bombs while adjusting his altitude to meet the same height as our heroes. Oddly, this is the only boss in the game that is safe to touch – you still need to avoid its rotor blades, though, obviously.

Difficulty Rating:

1 Insect Island

The first island in the game looks superb and really sets the scene and tone for the rest of the game. It's easy to work this out, but all of the enemies in *Rainbow Islands* relate to the name of their respective islands. For instance, this one is named 'Insect Island', hence it's full of deadly bugs, beetles, bees and the like. Clever stuff, huh?

Boss: Spider Boss



The first boss is this giant spider that bounces up and down the screen, trying to flatten our heroes. Use his predictable attack pattern to your advantage by moving left to right and smacking him with rainbows every time he lands.

Difficulty Rating:



3 Monster Island

A popular island among fans of the game, this one. The theme of this island is gothic horror and, as such, the stages are filled with Frankenstein's monsters, skeletons, werewolves and lightning-bolt lobbing vampires. This stage is the point at which the game ramps up the challenge.

Boss: Dracula



If the previous two bosses were cakewalks then this one is a break-dance on hypodermic needles. This grinning git will chase you around the screen, only stopping to regurgitate vampire bats. Get in some quick rainbow blasts then get above him to smash some rainbow-of-dawns onto his bonce.

Difficulty Rating:

7 Dragon Island

Those who have only played home conversions of *Rainbow Islands* – save for any PC Engine owners who had the game, which we can safely assume was nobody in the UK – will know this island as being the last in the game. In actual fact, though, it isn't. In the original arcade game there are a further three to go after this. This particular level is another toughie, and features a random assortment of foes, including knights, cyclopses, acid, ghosts and dragons.



Boss: Dragon Boss

There should be no prizes for guessing what the boss is on this island. That's right: a giant fire-breathing dragon. His attack, a long blast of fire breath, is a bugger to evade, but thankfully this boss is not the quickest of foes, so it's pretty easy to get round him. Be sure to stay above or below him at all times.

Difficulty Rating:

8 Magical Island

Like Doh's Island, the last three islands in the game are themed on other Taito game franchises. Magical Island's theme is Taito's one-screen platformer *Fairyland Story*, and features a bunch of enemy sprites from the game. It's a difficult island to beat owing to the liveliness of the enemies on this stage – especially those bloody kangaroo warriors.



Boss: Devil

The boss of this island is the devil character that would hurry players on their way if they dawdled for too long. As you might expect, he attacks with his pitchfork, which he throws at Bubby and Bobby. Thankfully, he's not that hard to kill – just get in with some early rainbow attacks and keep above him.

Difficulty rating:

6 Robot Island

Most of the enemies on Robot Island are complete gits. They're all quick, some fire projectiles, and the crammed layout of this level doesn't really help your cause any. But if you can reach this point you should be well-versed in tackling everything that the game throws at you. Possibly the trickiest level in the game, this one, so be warned.



Boss: Robot Boss

This boss behaves, and can be defeated in a similar way, to the helicopter boss from Toy Island. Use your rainbows to stay off the ground, and keep him above you at all times, as he has a nasty attack that sees him launch himself across the screen that is very difficult to dodge.

Difficulty Rating:

4 Toy Island

Toy Island looks similar to Combat Island, but is set inside some weird nightmarish world in which toys are deadly killing machines. This level's annoyances include boxing gloves, water pistols, grabber arms, marionette teddy bears and an infuriating bouncing ball with a picture of a skull painted on it. They are the absolute bane of this stage.



Boss: Clown Boss

Like the Dracula boss but far more erratic. Rather than lumber around like a zombie in a swimming pool, he spins like a Catherine wheel, firing mini-clowns as he goes. Keep your distance, adopt a fire while jumping technique to avoid rainbow build-up, and aim to take him down quickly.

Difficulty Rating:

5 Doh's Island

The enemies on this stage are abstract sprites taken from the game *Arkanoid II*, and compared to the last few islands this one's a doddle. The only foes that prove to be a real headache are those resembling metal playing cards as they plough through rainbows like a hot coal through snow. On this island there's also a cool you-can-see-it-coming stage that sees the twins having to work their way up to the top of the level relying only on their rainbow-producing magic powers.



Boss: Doh

Once you've twigged how to defeat him, Doh is the easiest boss in the game. He just sits high up in the middle of the screen, not moving, spewing metal playing cards. The trick is to draw his fire beneath him and, on the last card he fires, climb onto a rainbow and then jump up to hit him. Just repeat this process and voilà!

Difficulty Rating:



Specification

- **Year released:** 1990 (Taiwan), 1991 (International)
- **Original price:** £59.95 (UK)
- **Associated magazines:** None
- **Why the Gamate was great:** To be brutally honest, the Gamate was anything but great. However, for collectors it represents something of a Holy Grail as far as retro gaming is concerned: it's incredibly obscure, features a sizeable library of games and isn't currently emulated.
- **Buy it now for:** £25-£50+

Instant Expert

The UK distributor of the Gamate, Cheetah Marketing, was more famous for its range of joysticks, including the 125 and Mach 1.

In its native Taiwan, the Gamate was known as 'Chaoji Xiaozi', which literally translates as 'Super Boy'.

Gamate games come in three types of packaging: International (English with other European languages via stickers), Italian and Taiwanese (in Chinese).

It's hard to be sure just how many games were actually released for the Gamate, but most collectors generally agree that the figure lies somewhere between 60 and 70, with many insisting that 71 games made it into production.

***Battle Tank* and** *Vindicators* are listed as two different games in the Gamate library but they are, in fact, the same, just with different title screens. The same goes for *Enchanted Bricks* and *Brick Blaster*.

The curiously named *Dino Ball* is a pinball title for the Gamate, which contains no dinosaurs whatsoever.

Many of the Gamate software cases feature screenshots that vary from the actual game contained within, possibly due to them being taken from unfinished or prototype editions of the software.

Like the Game Boy that it tried so hard to emulate, the Gamate offers only mono sound through its single speaker but supports stereo via headphones.

UMC – which stands for United Microelectronics Corporation – is still in business today. The company's website can be found at **www.umc.com**.

Bit Corp was also known as Puzzy in its homeland.

GAMATE

You may consider your FM Towns Marty, MSX or WonderSwan to be off the beaten track as far as videogame hardware goes, but you haven't seen anything until you've witnessed the understated glory of the Gamate. Damien McFerran unearths the story behind this most obscure of handhelds

When Nintendo launched the original Game Boy to a rapturous reception in 1989, it was almost a foregone conclusion that other companies would follow suit and concoct their own portable systems. Arch-rival Sega quickly pushed the Game Gear onto store shelves, and industry veteran Atari contributed the tremendously powerful Lynx, but less famous pretenders to the throne also appeared, including the little-known Gamate, manufactured by a tiny Asian firm known as Bit Corp.

"Bit Corp was one of Taiwan's first videogame companies, active since at least the early Eighties," recounts Alex Evans, webmaster of gaming curio website NeoFuji and arguably the world's leading source of Gamate knowledge. "It developed a number of games for the Atari 2600, many of which saw release in Europe. With the rise of the Famicom in the mid-Eighties, Bit Corp moved onto that system with *Duck Maze* – the first Taiwanese-developed Famicom game – in 1987 and published at least four more titles in the following two years. Bit Corp also produced hardware, mostly clones of other popular consoles, but they tended to be a cut above the generic copies that their contemporaries were producing. Aside from the obligatory Atari 2600 and Famicom clones, it released two computers – the Bit-60 and Bit-90 – which were based on Atari 2600 and ColecoVision hardware respectively and maintained compatibility with each console's cartridges. Bit Corp also exploited the similarity between the ColecoVision and Sega's SG-1000 to create a hybrid console called the Dina 2-in-1, which was sold as the Telegames Personal Arcade in the US."

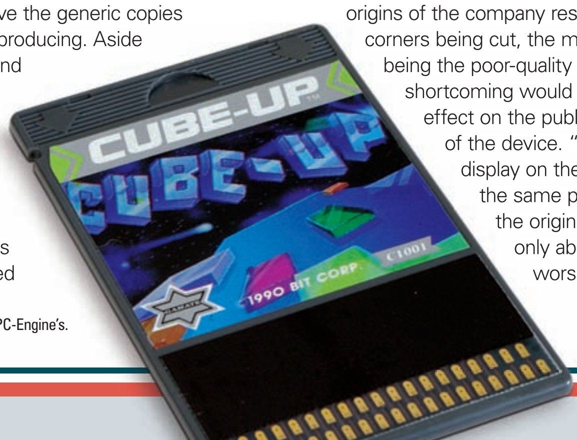
Taking this history into account, it's clear that Bit Corp had a lot of experience with videogame hardware and was therefore perfectly positioned to capitalise on the new-found public appreciation for portable gaming. Unsurprisingly, given the company's penchant for plagiarising the work of other firms, the resultant Gamate shared many similarities with Nintendo's groundbreaking handheld. "While it's difficult to determine exactly what kind of CPU the Gamate has – it appears to be a custom part, and the manual only states that it's 8-bit – the console has the same type of display, same amount of RAM, same control configuration and very similar graphical and audio capabilities to the Game Boy," explains Evans. "It even takes the same kind of AC adaptor. Clearly it was heavily inspired by Nintendo's machine, but I don't think it's an exact clone, as some have speculated – the screen resolution seems to be slightly different, for example."



» The Gamate was reviewed unfavourably in EMAP's *CVG* and *Complete Guide To Consoles* magazines.

One area where the Gamate differed from the Game Boy was the way in which its games were delivered, with Bit Corp favouring a card-style format similar to examples previously seen on the NEC PC-Engine and Sega Master System. "Much like NEC and Sega's cards, they're roughly credit-card sized, only somewhat thicker, and the majority of the card is actually solid plastic that only serves as a place for the label to go," says Evans. "The PCB is only about a third of the entire card's length, and consists of two small chips on a thin board, covered in epoxy and glued down. I'm not sure why this format was chosen – a more traditional Game Boy-style cartridge would have offered more space for larger ROM chips and extra features like a save battery, allowing the developers to create larger, more complex games – but it certainly stands out in people's minds as a pretty unique feature and it's always nice to be able to store your games in your wallet."

While Bit Corp clearly wished to emulate the performance of its more illustrious rival, the humble origins of the company resulted in a few corners being cut, the most obvious being the poor-quality screen. This shortcoming would have a dramatic effect on the public perception of the device. "The LCD display on the Gamate has the same problem as the original Game Boy, only about ten times worse: it suffers from shocking motion blur," laments Evans. "This actually renders some games, such as the vertical shooter *Tornado*, nearly unplayable, because small, fast-moving objects like bullets become invisible. Some later models of the console feature a slightly improved screen, which goes some way towards alleviating this issue; it isn't perfect, but at least you can see everything. Bit Corp appear to have been using both the good and bad screens at the same time, so it may well have been a case of them using two different screen suppliers simultaneously for one reason or another, rather than making a conscious effort to fix the problem."



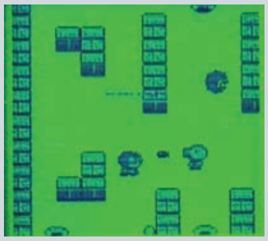
» Gamate games come on cards, similar to the PC-Engine's.

Given Bit Corp's diminutive stature and lack of budget, there was never any question of the company marketing the Gamate in territories outside its homeland. However, thanks to the success of the Game Boy and the sudden interest in portable gaming, Bit Corp was able to secure several distribution deals, which got the device into an impressive number of different countries, albeit with relatively low-key results.

"The Gamate appears to have been released in most major videogame markets, possibly excluding Japan," says Evans. "I know for sure it was sold in the UK, Italy, France, Germany, Switzerland, North America, Argentina, Uruguay, Taiwan and possibly mainland China, although units probably made their way into many more countries via local distributors." Joystick manufacturer Cheetah took on the UK distribution duties, clearly hoping that Game Boy fever would rub off on this plucky new challenger, and it certainly had a fighting chance: the unit itself launched at a very reasonable £59.95 – £10 less than Nintendo was selling its machine for – and software retailed for around £15. Sadly the critical reaction wasn't favourable, with EMAP's *Computer & Video Games* magazine highlighting the lack of big-name titles, poor screen and generally dire quality of software as being the main reasons to leave the console on the shelf. The Gamate never got off the ground in the United Kingdom and Cheetah eventually abandoned the format – although that didn't quite mark the end of the console's British aspirations. "Interestingly, it seems to have been released in the UK twice," reveals Evans. "First by Cheetah, then again by Maplin, though it looks like they had similar trouble shifting them. I've seen game boxes with 99p stickers on them – games that now go for £50 or more on eBay."

Elsewhere in Europe the Gamate found a somewhat warmer reception. "The Italian distributor of the machine, GiG, was actually quite a major player in the toy business," explains Evans. "They were the official distributor for the NES in the country, so presumably were able to use their marketing clout

The Perfect Five



01 Snowman Legend 1991

■ Best described as a cross between *Snow Bros* and *Sokoban*, this charming title is one of the Gamate's better offerings. This is a definite must-have if you're serious about owning a Gamate. There's even a *Space Invaders* mini-game in there, too.



02 Tornado 1991

■ Despite the rather serious tone of the box art, this surprisingly enjoyable little shooter is actually closer to the likes of Konami's *Parodius* and *TwinBee* titles, boasting a bizarre range of cute and cuddly enemies to blow to pieces.



» *Bomb Blaster* was Bit Corp's take on Hudson's massively popular *Bomberman* series. It completely failed to capture any of the magic of its inspiration.

and sales network to get the console into far more homes than it managed elsewhere." Indeed, most of the Gamate titles currently changing hands on eBay are Italian variants, which suggests that the format experienced a modicum of success in that region.

One of the reasons that the Game Boy was so tremendously triumphant was because it enjoyed a surfeit of support from renowned third-party developers like Capcom, Konami, Taito and Electronic Arts. The Gamate, on the other hand, had to rely largely on internal development to create its modest library of titles, with Bit Corp's overworked and under-appreciated programmers handling most of this output. "There were no third-party publishers, but I know of at least two external developers working under contract with Bit Corp: Gamtec Corp, based in Taiwan, and Hengmao Electronics in mainland China," reveals Evans. "These relatively unknown companies managed to produce at least 71 games during the console's lifetime, which – in terms of quantity, at least – puts the Gamate ahead of every other minor player in the handheld market, including such far more well-known flops as the N-Gage, Game.com, Watara Supervision and Gizmondo." However, quantity doesn't always result in quality, as Evans freely admits: "The games themselves are a mixed bag, once you get past the console's audio-visual issues. They're not as uniformly terrible as some people make them out to be, but nor are they good enough to make the Gamate anything more than an interesting curiosity. Many show promise but were clearly rushed, which is a shame. *Myth Of Asamia* is a good example of this – it's an otherwise decent platformer ruined by shoddy jumping controls. Another game, *Flying Goblin*, was even released with the description to an entirely different game – *Mars Voyager* – on the back of the box. The developers weren't incompetent by any means, but they were clearly under pressure to get as much product out of the door as possible with limited time and resources to do so – after all, Bit Corp was a small company, with development support from a couple of even smaller companies, trying to take on a multinational behemoth with the world's biggest developers and publishers behind it."

In 1992, the strain of keeping the Gamate dream alive proved to be too much for Bit Corp. The company hit shaky financial ground but, astonishingly, the demise of its manufacturer didn't spell the end for the underdog console. "Gamate production was taken over by the semiconductor manufacturer UMC and its subsidiary Funtech, which was also known as Dunhuang Technology," says Evans.

This move was actually a smoother transition than you might otherwise expect, as UMC played a major part in the birth of the machine, albeit as a chip supplier rather than a creative force. "All Gamate consoles contain a UMC chip, but UMC chips were a fairly ubiquitous presence in all Taiwanese game consoles of the period – most early Famicom clones used UMC's copies of Nintendo chips, for example," explains Evans. "It may have been the case that UMC initially just supplied chips to Bit Corp, before taking over the whole Gamate operation as its first foray into the videogame market after Bit Corp's demise."

> **"I've seen game boxes with 99p stickers on them going for £50 or more on eBay"**

Despite battling on under the arm of UMC and managing to carve out a modest niche in Italy, the Gamate eventually fell by the wayside in the face of the Game Boy's unrelenting dominance and the gaming public's crushing indifference. A colour version of the console was mooted at one point, but Evans is unconvinced that it was anything more solid than an idle rumour intended to keep already slim hopes alive. "I've been unable to find any evidence of its existence," he admits. "Supposedly it was exhibited at CES and mentioned in a US game magazine, but I could never find the magazine in question, nor anything else more substantive than rumours about it being released in small quantities in Taiwan or entirely unlikely places like Mexico."

By the close of 1993 the Gamate was all but deceased, with only the most dedicated of fans mourning its demise. The lack of solid figures makes it hard to determine just how poorly it sold, but it's pretty obvious that it wasn't a commercial smash hit by any stretch of the imagination. "Judging by the scarcity of second-hand units it seems to have been a pretty spectacular flop – it was certainly in no danger



» The Gamate console was exported to many different countries. This Electrolab example was sold in Argentina, but instead of creating new packaging the distributor merely placed stickers over the English text.



Revision Provision

Despite its relatively short lifespan, the Gamate hardware underwent some subtle revisions, many of which are only obvious to those collectors who are savvy enough to spot the slight differences. "The main chipset appears to have been revised at some point during the production run, although this was presumably done for cost reasons as it doesn't seem to have any discernible effect on performance," states Evans. "I've also been in touch with a Taiwanese collector who owned a white machine, which they described as 'second-generation', but everything other than the colour appears to be identical. Internally, there are at least a couple more variations to be found – perhaps the most noticeable is the screen. Basically the Gamate seems to have had two different types of LCD screen used throughout its lifespan; one is somewhat better than the other, in as much as it actually allows you to see projectiles and such, although it still isn't great. The easiest way to tell which one you have is by turning the Gamate on without a game in: the 'bad' one displays horizontal lines while the 'good' one displays a slightly corrupted checkerboard pattern."

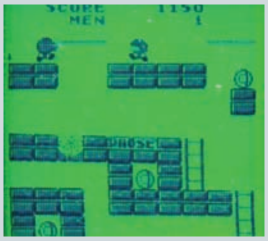
Evans explains how some iterations of the machine are incredibly rare and highly sought-after: "The very earliest versions of the Gamate featured a noticeably different case design, with different speaker holes, button recesses and D-pad, but this is considerably rarer than the standard version. I've seen one for sale on eBay, but none of the Gamate owners I've been in touch with actually have one."





03 Devil Castle 1991

■ The gothic setting and platforming action naturally inspire comparisons with Konami's legendary *Castlevania* series, and this has led to *Devil Castle* becoming one of the Gamate's most sought-after titles for collectors.



04 Treasure Hunter 1990

■ The Gamate was blessed with two *Lode Runner* clones between this and *Witty Apee*, but *Treasure Hunter* takes the crown as the best facsimile of Douglas E Smith's legendary title for the system.

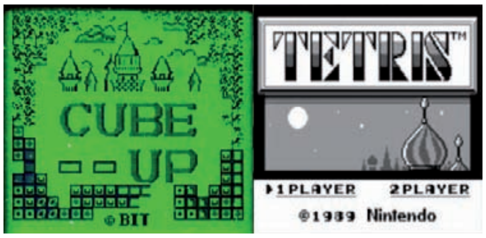


05 Mini Golf 1991

■ Viewed from a top-down perspective, this unique golf simulation doesn't strive for realism but instead presents a refreshingly fast-paced take on the art of sinking balls into holes, with obstacles to negotiate and an unusual cursor-based control system.

Attack of the Clones

As was common practice in the age of the 8-bit micro computer, the Gamate's software library was packed full of shameless copies of existing hits, all of which Bit Corp had neither the inclination nor the funds to acquire and develop legitimately. Games cunningly replicated for the handheld include *Super Pang* (*Boom*), *Pitfall* (*Monster Pitfall*), *Bomberman* (*Bomb Blaster*), *Columns* (*Jewelriss*), *Lode Runner* (*Witty Apee* and *Treasure Hunter*), *Galaxian* (*Galaxy Invaders*), *Battle City* (*Mighty Tank*), *Breakout* (*Brick Blaster*), *Flipull* (*Flipuzzle*), *Lock 'N' Chase* (*Money Maze*) and *Tetris* (*Cube-Up*). *Pipe Mania* was also ported to the console under its original name, although it doesn't appear to be a licensed version. Finally we have *Mars Voyager*, which isn't a clone as such but bears more than a passing resemblance to Konami's *Gradius*, right down to a Moai statue featuring on the back of the box. Given Bit Corp's lack of cash and humble talent as a creator of games, it's almost forgivable that so many of the Gamate's titles were wholesale rip-offs, but sadly few – if any – of these copies managed to come anywhere near to the quality of the software they intended to emulate.



of bothering the Game Boy, Game Gear, or even the Lynx," states Evans.

Clearly, in the pantheon of gaming, the Gamate occupies a pretty lowly perch, and even hardcore fan Evans struggles to counter such a viewpoint. In purely business terms, the console can only be seen as a devastating disappointment. "Even in Italy, where it seems to have done comparatively well, it evidently didn't do quite well enough for its distributor to release the later games," he admits. "The only way to know for sure if it was truly a commercial failure is to find out whether Bit Corp and UMC actually made money on the project. It was never going to outsell the Game Boy but it may well have been a success by their own modest standards. The fact that Bit Corp went bust during the system's lifetime is hardly an encouraging sign, but UMC must have done decent enough business to not be put off the games industry completely – although it's worth noting that the firm's second console, the 16-bit Super A'Can, would lose UMC $6 million and lead to the closure of its entire game division."



» Amusingly, the back of each Gamate card features a warning to avoid touching the "Golden Finger by hands". Sound advice indeed.

Ironically, the Gamate's humble standing in the world of portable entertainment has made it a highly sought-after system in retro collecting circles, with unboxed machines fetching anything from £25 to over £50 on the rare occasions that they actually turn up on eBay. "I'd say it's down to its extreme obscurity coupled with a fairly large software library," comments Evans when asked about this bizarre and almost frenzied demand for failed hardware. "It's quite unusual for a console that most people – even most retro enthusiasts – have never heard of to have had over 70 games released for it. I suspect the fact that it has never been emulated is also a factor: the only way to play any of those games is to actually own them."

It would seem that the Gamate is destined to be considered a weird and wonderful collectable rather than a truly worthy gaming platform. Its abject failure and relatively unknown status appear to be the driving factors in its appeal to truly hardcore retro enthusiasts; certainly as a console it offered little in the way of mouthwatering features. "I have to admit it's pretty unacceptable that the vast majority of Gamate consoles are equipped with a screen that actually renders several of its games unplayable," Evans says. "The speaker is equally poor, too; some Gamate games have fairly good music, but you'd never notice without headphones. Having said that, there's nothing particularly wrong with the actual design of the machine; it was just let down by crap parts being used in the most obvious places. In a way, it's impressive they got as far as they did, but ultimately they took one too many short cuts and sacrificed too much quality for quantity when it came to software. Perhaps if they had cut the number of games by half and delayed the console's release to work out its hardware problems and give the developers more time to polish things up, they could have had a minor success on their hands. Unfortunately, it wasn't to be."

Thanks to Alex Evans for kindly supplying his Gamate console for the photography used in this feature. You can check out his site by visiting fuji.drillspirits.net.

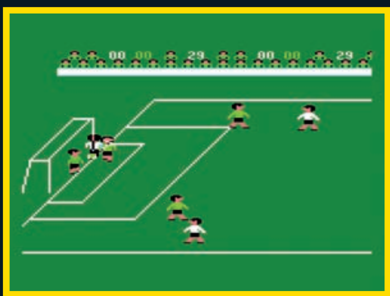




» The cute little chap riding atop this Gamate doesn't have an official name, although there is speculation that he was intended to be a *Mario*-style mascot.

» EXPOSING RETRO GAMES THAT ARE PROBABLY BEST LEFT IN THE PAST

WORLD CUP CARNIVAL



» [CPC] Anyone else agree with us that the footballers in the CPC version look like receptionists?

GAME INFO



» **SYSTEM:** SPECTRUM, C64, AMSTRAD CPC
» **RELEASED:** 1985
» **PUBLISHER:** US GOLD
» **GENRE:** SPORTS



» [C64] The various versions might look quite a bit different from one another, but no one game plays any better.



A WORD FROM THE HERO

"Hola, Chicos and Chiquitos. It's Pique the pepper here, official mascot of the 1986 World Cup. I come to you with a little confession: I was the mysterious freelancer approached to write the game. Thinking outside the penalty box, I submitted a platform game that played similarly to *Marco's Magic Football*, but starring me and my then-girlfriend Josie the Taco. US Gold didn't like it and was forced to make a last-minute substitution."

Considering how popular football was in the Eighties and that this was the official football game of the 1986 World Cup, you'd think that US Gold would have done everything in its power to produce a half-decent footy sim in a bid to help secure future rights and create its generation's EA Sports. It would make sense, right? So what went so horribly wrong?

Well after securing the licence it's believed that US Gold farmed the project out to external freelancers and the product that came back was so bad that the publisher was forced to buy, and rebrand, Artic Computing's *World Cup Football*. In the interim period between the purchase and the impending World Cup deadline, US Gold ordered that a bit of World Cup bunting be added to the game before shipping the thing out full price to an unsuspecting public. The resultant reaction was something akin to the effigy burning sparked by Diego Maradona's infamous 'Hand of God' goal, which ironically occurred in that very same World Cup. But before we can dissect the many horrible parts of *World Cup Carnival*, consider this: how bad must the game submitted by those freelancers in the first place have been?

The game starts off promising enough, though. Players have the choice of either jumping straight into the game's World Cup tournament or honing their ball control skills in Practice mode, which allows you to perfect taking and saving penalties and playing keepie uppie – neither of which actually occur in the main game, but there you go. 'Ball Control' is by far the better of the three mini-games on offer and plays like a very bad version of the Hacky Sack event in *California Games*, while penalty-taking involves waggling the joystick to build up your player's speed as they run toward the penalty spot and then hitting the fire button to strike the ball. But this isn't as easy as it sounds, as the window of success is so infinitesimal that more often than not your player will miss the hit zone completely and continue to run right past the penalty spot like Forrest Gump scoring a touchdown. Annoyingly, even if you manage to connect with the ball, the goalie ensures that you never score thanks to his superhuman saving skills – which, though successful, seem to just involve pacing the goal mouth, blocking shots like a human bollard.

As you might expect – or not – the game's World Cup mode is a traditional five-a-side tournament and warps you straight to the quarter finals of the tournament. Football, as it's presented in this game, is like witnessing ten men trying to capture a field mouse. Keeping with that analogy for a moment, tackling seems to involve rubbing one of your player sprites over an opposing footballer and hoping that the little mouse prefers sitting on your foot rather than his. Passing is also a complete mystery, as your team-mates never actually move, let alone jostle into any sort of position to create a decent set piece, and the very best way to score in this game is to simply run the ball over the opposition's goal line like Jonah Lomu.

Amazingly, the World Cup component in this game is so bad that it actually makes the practice sections feel like the main game. Had the game been called *Football Skills Carnival* and come with a little sticker on its box saying 'Features bonus World Cup mode' then this atrocious game could have almost been passable. *Almost.*

» THE POINTLESS PARTS



SHOOTING

Kicking a ball should be simple. In *World Cup Carnival*, though, even gifting the ball to the opposition takes real skill.



PASSING

Passing is flaky at best, with players unable to add any real sense of accuracy, control or precision to their passes.

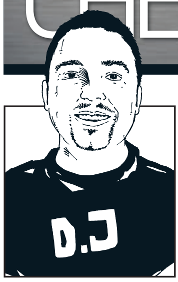


TACKLING

We're still none the wiser as to how the tackling works. It seems to rest on a potent cocktail of luck, chance and happenstance.

CLASSIC GAMING ON A BUDGET

CHEAP AS CHIPS



If there's one thing we've learnt about retro gaming, it's that your money can stretch an amazingly long way if you want it to. Granted, a mint copy of *Radiant Silvergun* is going to cost you a small fortune, but there are plenty of other worthy titles that can be picked up for less than a fiver…

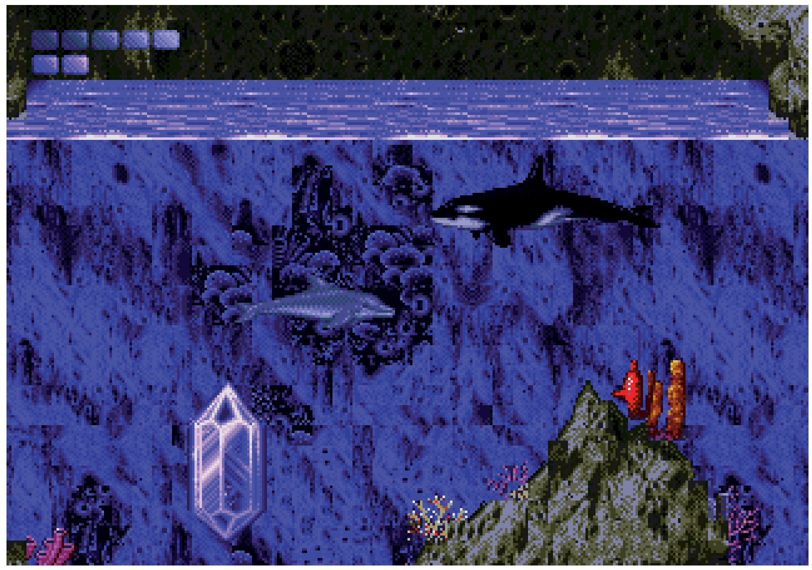
ECCO THE DOLPHIN

Sega's *Ecco The Dolphin* proves that even the most frustrating of games can achieve classic status and a cult following. While Novotrade's game was incredibly slick and boasted beautiful-looking visuals and a stunningly atmospheric soundtrack – more so if you were lucky enough to invest in the excellent Mega-CD version – it could also be horrifically annoying to play through. And yet, despite the high, often unfair difficulty levels, obtuse clues and general lack of direction that could have you wandering around with no clue as to what to do, it has become one of Sega's most well-known franchises, getting constantly released on formats like Steam, the Virtual Console and Xbox Live Arcade.

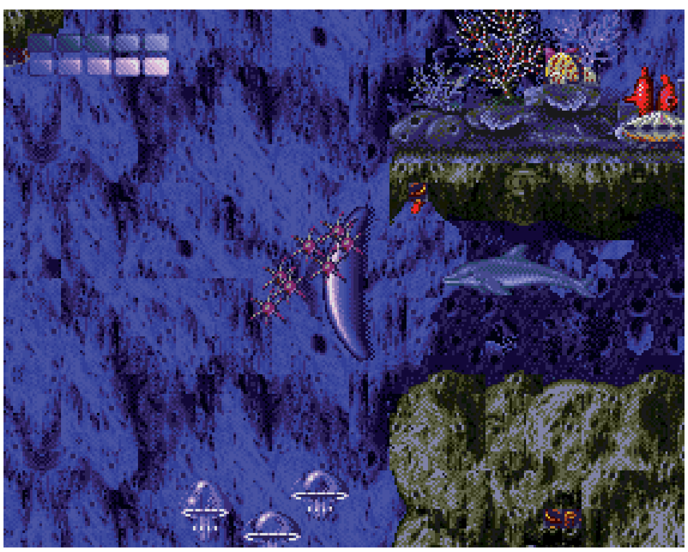


INFO

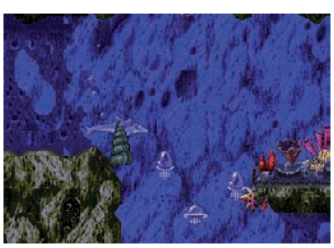
- » **SYSTEM:** MEGA DRIVE
- » **RELEASED:** 1992
- » **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- » **DEVELOPER:** NOVOTRADE INTERNATIONAL



» [Mega Drive] Ecco could talk to other sea creatures in order to receive bizarre hints.



» [Mega Drive] The puzzles of *Ecco* were often extremely frustrating and could cause a great deal of stress.





Now enjoying his 18th birthday, it's still easy to see Ecco's appeal, even if certain stages will continue to have you groaning with frustration when you revisit them. For starters, Ecco himself remains an endearing protagonist thanks to his beautiful animation and the fact that, unlike many other animal characters of the time, he actually feels real and believable. There's no bug-eyed goofiness on display, no clothes, no exaggerated features; there's just a dolphin that desperately wants to be reunited with the rest of his pod, and you'll do whatever you can to ensure that it happens. Even if that does mean using a cheat so you can skip the annoying penultimate stage, an outrageously tough scrolling maze that results in instant death whenever you make a wrong turn.



» [Mega Drive] Halfway through the game you're dropped into a shark-infested ocean with nowhere to hide. Swim, Ecco! Swim!

Ecco's watery world also remains a thing of beauty, and while the later Dreamcast and PS2 titles showed off just what Novotrade (by then known as Appaloosa) was capable of, the 2D flora and fauna on the Mega Drive still looks gorgeous, with its well-animated sprites and gorgeously drawn backdrops. Add in a haunting soundtrack that eerily replicates the lonely waters that Ecco finds himself in and you have a game that, while hardly pushing the Mega Drive, remains an aesthetic delight.

Another aspect of *Ecco* that continually appeals to us is just how damn dark it can be. The clues are abundant by just viewing Boris Vallejo's moody cover, but there are plenty of continuing touches as you play. Alarm can set in as the sunshine blues of *Ecco*'s surface world are replaced by deep, inky darkness, while huge octopuses and hordes of deadly stinging jellyfish quickly confirmed that this was no jolly jaunt like you'd experience in similar games of the time. And let's not forget the terrifying stage that drops you in shark-infested waters, where Ecco must swim for his life in an ocean that, like a bad dream, never appeared to end.

Ecco The Dolphin may have been tougher than old boots, and featured a barmy plot and even barmier level design, but it remains a classic, if somewhat flawed, game. Yes, it's frustrating, but it's also captivating, charming and atmospheric. A rarity in today's games, let alone those from nearly two decades ago.

Monty no Doki Doki Daisassou

MONTY ON THE RUN AND IN DISGUISE

» RETROREVIVAL



» FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM
» JALECO/GREMLIN GRAPHICS
» 1987

You've read the name, glanced at the screenshot, and probably have no clue what this exotic creature is. Except you do… and don't…

Two years after Gremlin Graphics released *Monty On The Run* on the Spectrum, Jaleco, the Japanese games developer, obtained a licence to convert the classic platform hit onto the Famicom Disk System.

The game's premise remained the same: Monty escapes prison, chooses his (two-piece) Freedom Kit and legs it as fast as he can across a platform-filled world of jumps, teleporters and heavy-duty crushers.

However, somewhere in the conversion process the programming team at Jaleco decided that Monty should be changed from a mole to human – and a Matthew Smith lookalike, no less. The graphics also underwent wholesale redesigns, as did the entire layout of the game. The only indication you now had that you were playing a *Monty* game was the very acceptable rendition of Rob Hubbard's original music at the intro screen and a copyright notice from Gremlin Graphics.

Was this move informed genius or commercial suicide, and has the game improved? No. The game lost the charisma and fluency of the original and only succeeded in morphing not only Monty but the game itself into an unremarkable, charmless, almost anonymous platform game.

That said, and as jaded as it is, there is something in the game that keeps you persevering with it. Probably curiosity at exploring a vaguely familiar world so disparate to the original source material that it's become a videogaming freak show that you can't stop staring at, rather than holding any long-lasting commitment to complete the game.

Don't get us wrong; it's not an awful game. It contains testing landscapes to negotiate with some crisp, detailed graphics in places. However, the feel of the game is more *Mario* than *Monty* and, as such, it just doesn't feel right.

However, it warrants a look just to marvel at why Jaleco spent money on a licensing deal to make something so utterly different. *



LUNAR LANDER

Touching down in arcades ten years after mankind took that giant leap, Lunar Lander was a big step forward for Atari. Paul Drury talks to Rich Moore and Howard Delman, the men who put coin-ops on the moon



IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** ATARI
» **DEVELOPER:** ATARI COIN-OP
» **RELEASED:** 1979
» **GENRE:** FLIGHT SIM
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £500+ FOR AN ORIGINAL CABINET

It's 20 July 1969 and a 13-year-old Rich Moore is up in his bedroom, transfixed by his tiny black and white television. "I had a Polaroid camera and took a picture of the screen as Neil Armstrong stepped on the moon," recalls Rich, triumphantly. "I remember building the Revell model kits of the full lunar lander module and the capsule; the ones with the glue you shouldn't smell…"

A decade later, Rich would be constructing that same lunar module; not from plastic this time, but with beams of light. He and Howard Delman created Atari's first game to utilise their new vector technology, a system that would go on to deliver such classics as *Asteroids*, *Tempest* and *Star Wars*, and with *Lunar Lander*, allowed a generation entranced by space travel to take their own small step onto a new world.

They weren't the first to try to translate the thrill of a moon mission into a game, though. Before 1969 was out, Jim Storer, a 17-year-old student, programmed a text-based simulation of the landing on his school's PDP-8/E minicomputer. As early as 1973, Jack Burness used the DEC's GT40 vector display to draw the luminous landscape for *Moonlander*, an early graphical version, which cleverly used the machine's integrated lightpen to control your fuel burn. Howard was familiar with both of these early efforts.

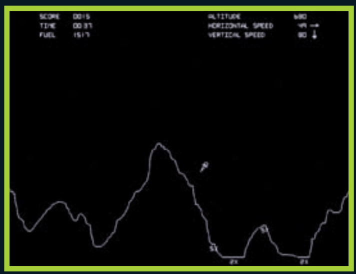
"I remember playing one at college, I think in the early Seventies, that was text based," he begins. "And I do recall when I was at Atari, having a tour of NASA's Ames Research Centre, which was almost walking distance from our offices. They had a version of the game playing on an old machine with this green phosphor screen. That was the first time I saw it on a graphical display and it was some inspiration for what we did at Atari. Actually, I'm not sure if that visit came before or after we had the idea for *Lunar Lander*. There have been many adult beverages since then…"

Howard had joined Atari in 1976 and worked on such diverse titles as *Canyon Bomber*, *Super Bug* and the pioneering co-op game *Fire Truck*. After he'd finished the latter, he began work on a pet project based on two giant diggers building hills of sand, but when that crumbled, Atari, who had noted the success of the first vector-based arcade game from rival coin-op company Cinematronics, set him to work on their response.

"We saw *Space Wars* and thought, holy shit we gotta get one too!" laughs Howard. "Atari had this off-site research group, the Grass Valley group, named after where they were based. They came up with the original hardware concept and showed up at our labs with it. It was quite cool, a nice framework, but still needed a lot of work. I was asked to turn it into something 'real', which sounded like fun!"

Building on the work of the boys from the Grass Valley special research group, or Cyan Engineering as they were more formally known, Howard set about ironing out various technical issues and making the system accessible for software engineers. "Once we saw we could make circles, squares and write words on the screen, the question came up, well, we need to do a game on this," explains Howard. "I was told to come up with an idea… I suggested *Lunar Lander* and they said, okay go!"

So in the autumn of 1978, the project was launched with Howard in control of the hardware and recent Atari recruit Rich Moore as programming pilot. Rich had joined the company in July of that year and had worked on their Superman and Hercules pinball tables but this was to be his first major videogame. "I remember my boss at the time, Steve Calfee, said hey, you ever played



» [Arcade] Try playing the game on Command mode. It's utter lunacy.


» The actual development board for *Lunar Lander*, with the ROMS in sockets so they could be easily changed.



» This test marquee had a mistake (a yellow rectangle above the large L) which was corrected before production.

this *Lunar Lander* game? I said yeah, back at Cal [University of California at Berkley], and he said well, do you want to work on it? I gave an automatic yes!"

Rich began by laying down the ground rules. Literally. "I got graph paper, which I think I bought myself because Atari didn't have any, and drafted out the co-ordinates of the vector lines for the landscape. I did that from my memories of the original game, the big mountain in the middle and these smaller ones either side. Howard and I would write the source code on paper and all data entry was done by two ladies, who were tremendous typists and got it done so much quicker that we could. They'd save it to these big eight-inch floppy disks and we'd take that to our development system, compile it, download it on an emulator and run it on the hardware."

A dynamic working partnership developed, with Howard tweaking the hardware while Rich tested out the refinements with new coding techniques. Ideas bounced between the pair, particularly over the crucial question of difficulty settings. "I wanted to make it as realistic as we could, but we quickly discovered that playing a realistic simulation of space flight was damn near impossible," acknowledges Howard. "Even the real lunar landers had computer assist!"

"The original DEC version had an easy, medium and hard and we added another setting to give four," continues Rich. "We spent a lot of time fine-tuning those difficulty levels, tweaking the numbers, trying to round out the difficulty curve."

For those who've played *Lunar Lander* on the hardest 'Command' mode will know it's one of the most painful difficulty spikes in gaming. Trying to land your craft with rotational momentum applied is akin to performing open-heart surgery on an ice-rink, wearing slippers. Thankfully, the boys added in friction to steady your ship and decreasing strengths of gravitational pull, which might have challenged the laws of physics but made things considerably less brutal for the player. The 'Training' mode that the game defaulted to was certainly no picnic, though, particularly if you were eschewing the more accessible landing pads, which only offered to double your basic 50-point reward

LUNAR NOTES

WITH *LUNAR LANDER* taking just over a year to go from conception to production, we asked Rich if any ideas didn't make the final version. "I wanted to put a McDonald's in," he chuckles, referring to the Golden Arches that featured in the original GT40 game. "I also wanted it so if you crashed, you saw the craters next time you played but it was new hardware and you had to be aware of refresh rates. There's only so much capacity, only so much line you can draw to give you a reasonable refresh rate." Rich also explains that a cocktail version of the game was planned but only two were ever built, one of which he has at home. "It was a two-player game so we added code to make the screen flip. It didn't make it into production because *Asteroids* came along and that was a runaway hit – it kind of consumed all the oxygen in the room!"

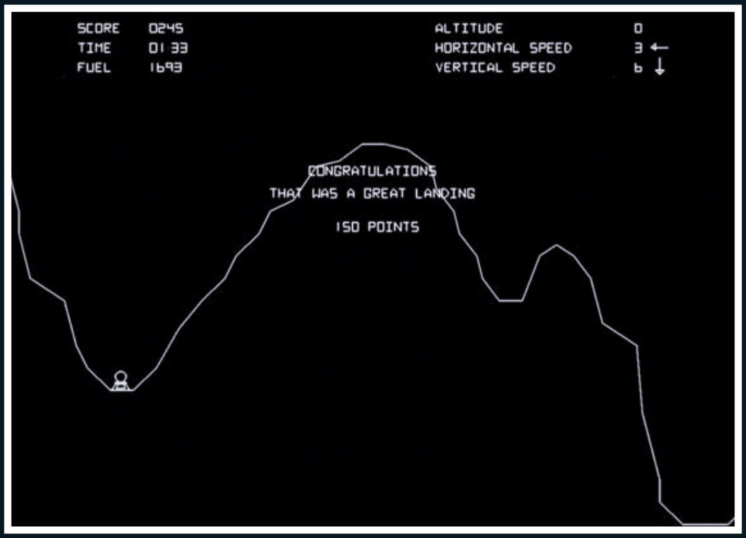
"I built kits of the lunar module when I was at High School; the ones with the glue you shouldn't smell…" Rich first built Lunar Lander in plastic, not code



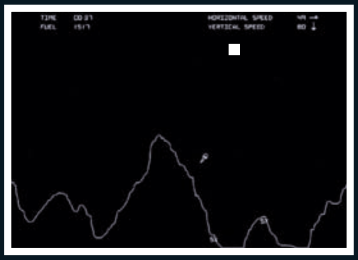
» The original field test cabinet, now living in Howard's basement.

FEELING GRAVITY'S PULL

WITH *LUNAR LANDER*'S recent appearance on the 360's Game Room service, we contacted MAME world record holder Ash Covey for tips on this most challenging of titles. "For maximum points, aim for the first 5x before the main peak, which you can access by just slowing down. For my high score of 2020, I was lucky with the placement of the landing pads, which change randomly. If you need to go past the main peak, hit your thrusters right from the start because the closer you get to the moon's gravity the less left to right speed you get. You're better off hitting the throttle wide open and doing what you need done as soon as possible rather than waiting and feathering the throttle. Once you have zero left-right movement and you're just trying to land at less than 15 vertical speed, you can stop watching the module and just concentrate on the instrumentation." Search YouTube for 'Lunar Lander Record' and see him make it look easy.



» [Arcade] A perfect 5x landing. Now do it eight times in a row…



"I wanted the thrust controller to be massive, something you could grab with your whole hand"

When it comes to thrusting, size matters…

» [Vic-20] The Vic-20's *Jupiter Lander* is one of our favourite early clones.



for a successful landing, and instead attempt a tricky landing on a site that promised a tempting 5x multiplier. As the in-game camera zooms in for a close-up of your final descent, you invariably find yourself hurtling towards the lunar surface at terrifying speed. Panicking at your impending impact, you suddenly notice a glowing red button marked 'abort'.

"The Save My Ass option," chuckles Howard. "You hit that and it saves you but it drinks a lot of fuel. Actually, if you've only got a little bit of fuel left and you're coming down fast, you hit that abort button at just the right moment and you get a fuel burn that slows you down and stops you right on the landing pad. I've only seen it done a few times. We used to try it in the lab and I think it's more luck than skill."

Retro Gamer salutes any brave captains that can master this technique, as touching down with a full tank is testing enough. The secret to a soft landing is judicious burning of fuel, keeping your craft stable and descending at a steady rate. The challenge, and indeed much of the game's appeal, comes from the chunky controller that allows you surprising subtlety as you approach the rocky landscape.

"I wanted something massive!" exclaims Howard. "I wanted something you could grab with your whole hand. Initially they talked about a simple joystick but I fought for it and got my way. When we'd be playing with that thing in the lab, I would grip it so tightly and try to push it through the stop to get just that bit more fuel burn. I had them put a big rubber piece in there to give people the sense you could push through the maximum, that if you pushed harder, you'd be able to burn just a little bit more!"

"That controller was something new," adds Rich. "The original game had thrust on or off but I think we had, like, ten levels of thrust. By giving the player more options, there are more ways for him to get it wrong than right, though!"

This innovative analogue controller gave the game a wonderful physical quality, as you slammed the lever down hard in a desperate attempt to slow your vertical speed to less than 15 and thus avoid a catastrophic crash. Space travel isn't cheap, though, and soon your 750 units of fuel would be running low, even with



» *Lunar Lander*'s distinctive font was created by Ed Logg and used in many of Atari's subsequent vector games. Here are Ed's early sketches.



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

SUPER BUG (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1977

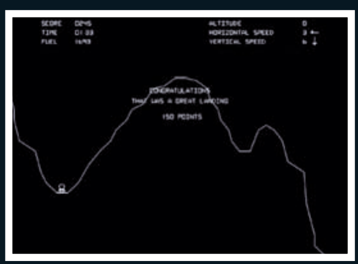
RED BARON
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1980

GUBBLE
SYSTEM: PC
YEAR: 1996



» [CPC] *Star Ranger* for the Amstrad CPC added some colour to proceedings.





the rather miserly 50 additional units awarded for a successful landing. Luckily, those with deep pockets, in an early take on the 'buy-in' concept, could simply slip in another quarter mid-game and find their fuel tanks replenished. "By letting you buy more, that played on the psychology of the player," explains Rich. "You're getting near the end; pop in another coin! There's a lot of emotion riding on that, particularly if you're close to landing."

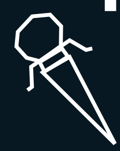
Even when the money did run out, there was still some fun to be had in plummeting moonward and seeing how spectacular your crash could be. As your tiny craft shattered into fading vectors, the game wittily commented on the size of the crater you'd left behind. "We tried to layer the gameplay, so there are several motivators," smiles Rich. "Can I land on the higher multipliers? Can I land at higher difficulty levels? Even when you crash, try to make that entertaining."

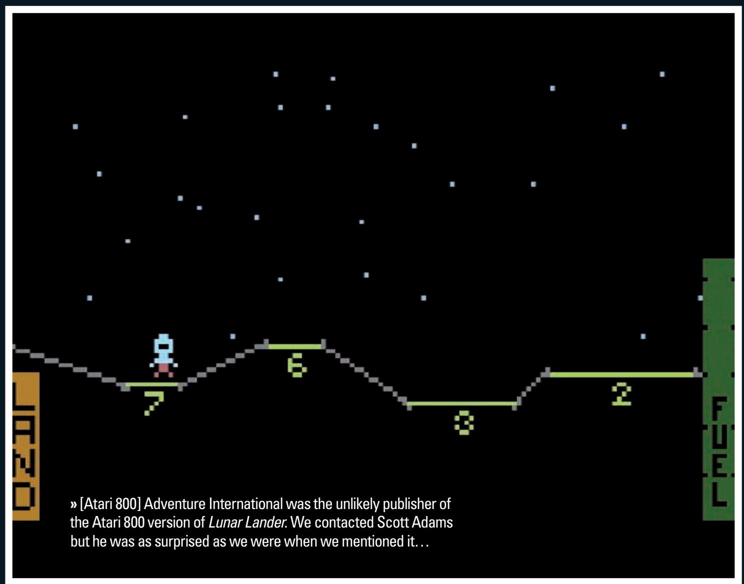
And *Lunar Lander* undoubtedly was entertaining, yet its arcade life was cut short after a mere three months, not by player apathy but by the arrival of the behemoth *Asteroids*, the demand for which meant the first 300 actually shipped in *Lunar Lander* cabinets. Despite being the hardware engineer for both games, we wonder whether Howard has mixed feelings about being sent to the dark side of the moon so soon? "We used to brag a bit to each other about how many our games had sold. *Lunar Lander* did 4,700 or so which was a great run at the time, but then *Asteroids* came along, sold over 70,000 and rewrote the book! Yeah, it would have been nice to see how well it could have done…"

Though overshadowed by the success of Atari's rock-breaking opus, *Lunar Lander* holds an important position in the company's history. It was their first vector game to reach the market and served as a test bed for the new technology. Rich casually mentions that Ed Logg used the source code as a starting point for *Asteroids* and indeed Rich himself built on what he'd learned and went on to produce the excellent *Red Baron*. And, of course, basing a game on such an iconic event as putting a man on the moon means it has a special place in many gamers' hearts, too.

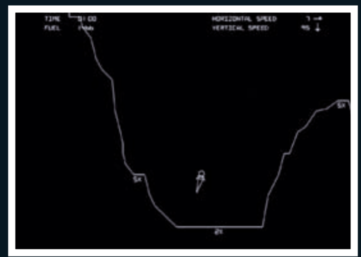
"I got a call out of the blue once from a guy who needed help fixing a *Lunar Lander* machine he'd bought at auction," says Howard. "Turned out he'd worked at NASA on the manned space flights and he sent me some patches from the missions as a thank you. It just blows me away that 30 years later, I still get contacted."

Shine on, vector moon…





» [Atari 800] Adventure International was the unlikely publisher of the Atari 800 version of *Lunar Lander*. We contacted Scott Adams but he was as surprised as we were when we mentioned it…



See Howard's website **www.rawbw.com/~delman/** for more on *Lunar Lander*, including a link to Benj Edwards' exhaustive history of the genre. Thanks to Marty C and Marty G for their help.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

RETRO GAMER DIGS UP THE FILES OF THE CLASSIC COMPANIES OF OLD

Superior Software

Superior Software was the premier BBC Micro and Electron games company. It was founded in 1982 and stuck around until the very end of the Acorn era, and it's still in business today

If you owned a BBC Micro or an Electron back in the day, odds were that a new Superior Software release would herald a dent in your weekly finances. The company, started in 1982 by Richard Hanson and John Dyson, went on to dominate the BBC Micro and Acorn Electron scene. As well as becoming the biggest producer of 8-bit Acorn games, Superior focused on high-quality productions, concentrating on full price rather than budget games. As well as dominating the 8-bit Acorns, Superior Software made some releases for the mighty 32-bit Acorn Archimedes and even dabbled outside the Acorn hardware world. To top it off, the company is still in business today, mainly focusing on updated releases of the Superior back catalogue.

The early years

Previously, Hanson and Dyson had both written games for the Acorn Atom, the precursor to the BBC Micro, for Program Power, a publisher that later became known as Micro Power. Having each bought a BBC Micro shortly after its release, they made the decision to go into business for themselves as publishers and Superior Software was born.

The pair began Superior Software with an initial investment of £100 for advertising and four games that they had written themselves. When we got in touch with Hanson, he told us: "We were very pleased with the sales of these games, which covered the cost of the advertisement several times over." Buoyed by this early success, they decided to advertise more widely and to encourage submissions in order to increase the size of the Superior Software catalogue.

"The initial setup was John and me," he recalled, "and then we started to employ other people. As the business expanded, a key appointment was Steve Botterill as general manager, and a year or so later, Chris Payne as marketing manager."

The signature Superior Software dedication to professionalism, in an era dominated by a cottage industry mentality, was reflected in the recollections of all of the developers that we spoke to. Gary Partis (*Syncron*, *Hostages*), for example, recalled that Superior Software, along with fellow publisher Micro Power, were the most professional publishers that he dealt with at the time. He remarked: "You could always ring up Richard Hanson and talk to him. They always paid royalties on time, whereas some other companies tried all sorts of tactics not to pay."

Many of the earliest Superior Software games were directly inspired by popular arcade games of the day. *Centibug*, one of the first releases, had very similar looks and gameplay to the Atari arcade game *Centipede*. For a fan of Konami arcade game *Time Pilot*, *Space Pilot* might be just what you're looking for. Similarly, fans of Namco's *Dig Dug* or Universal's *Mr Do* would probably be interested in a game called *Mr Wiz*. For that matter, the graphics and play mechanics of *Deathstar* aren't far away from Williams' *Sinistar*.

INSTANT EXPERT

The first four games, written by the founders of the company, were *Galaxy Birds*, *Invaders*, *Space Fighter* and *Centibug*.

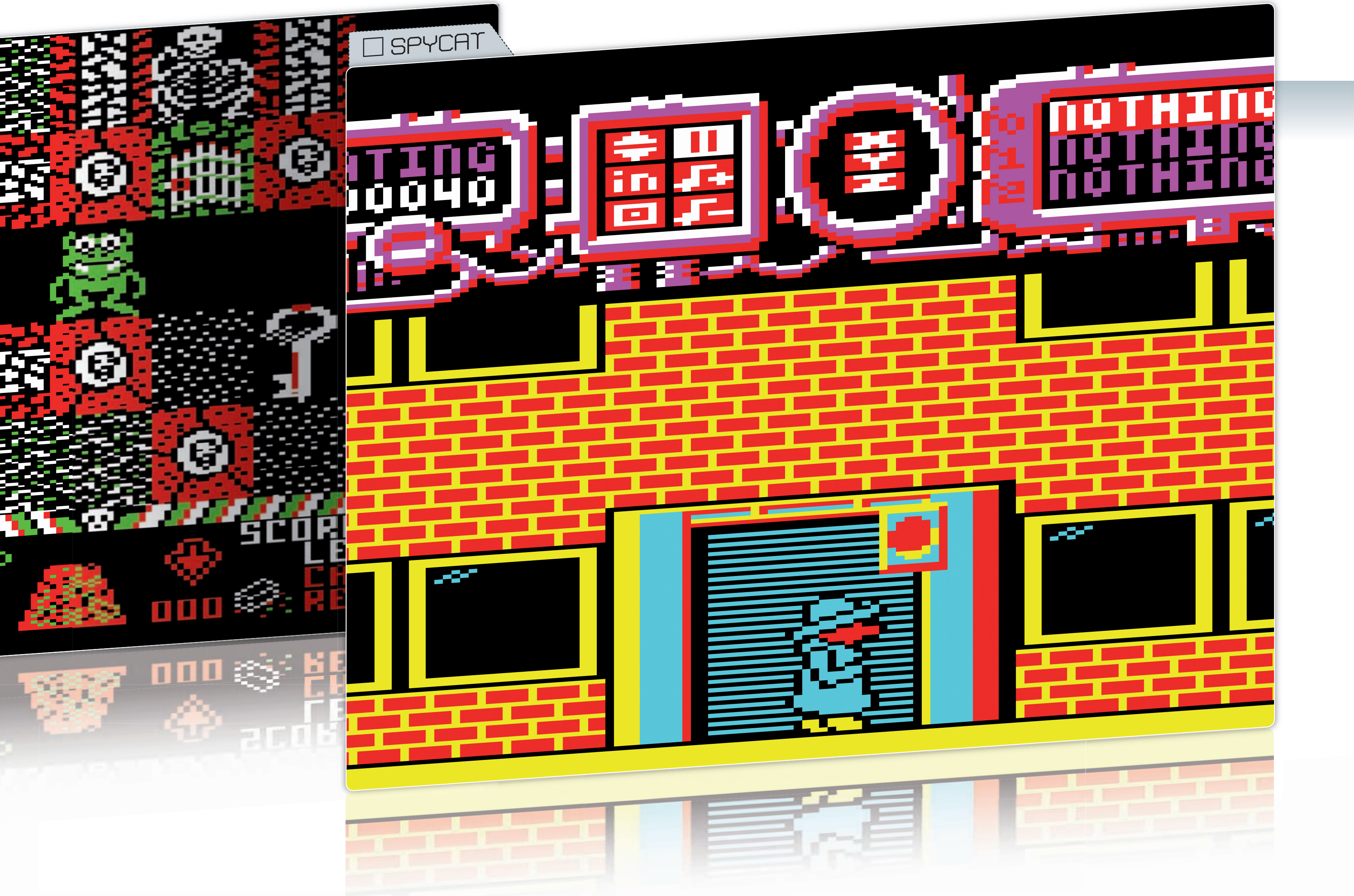
The first, tentative advert for the company's products was placed in a magazine called *Computing Today* in 1982.

Superior Software and Micro Power, the two biggest independent games publishers for the BBC Micro and Electron, were both based in Leeds.

The *Repton* series has been the bestseller for Superior, with sales over 120,000 units. Other strong sellers were *Elite*, *Overdrive*, *Tempest*, *Citadel*, *Thrust*, *Galaforce*, *Ravenskull*, *Stryker's Run*, *Codename: Droid*, *Ballistix*, *Revs*, *Exile*, and *Speech!*.

The standard pricing structure for Superior Software games was £9.95 for cassette, £11.95 for 5.25-inch disk and £14.95 for Master Compact 3.5-inch disk. However, a few games, such as *Exile* and *Repton Infinity*, were sold at £14.95 for the standard disk version.

The BBC Micro and Electron both came with a fairly extensive programming environment, including an assembler, built in to the ROM. This meant that it was possible to write a professional quality game with just the machine itself and no other software.



SPYCAT

> **“We had to frame the screen with the code itself – which looked like random noise!”**
>
> PETER IRVIN ON FITTING EXILE INTO THE ELECTRON



The style of game that worked best on the BBC Micro was dictated by the limitations of the hardware and the taste of the demographic that owned this expensive, education-oriented computer. In its favour, it featured colourful graphics coupled with a fairly fast CPU, although it lacked features such as the hardware sprite capability of some competing machines. It was also a platform for which floppy disk drives were relatively common. Working against the Beeb, as a games platform, was the fact that it was very memory constrained with only 32K of RAM, the best screen modes taking up 20K on their own. All of this combined to create a market for a thoughtful breed of game that placed less importance on blistering speed and mind-blowing graphics.

This principle is epitomised by Superior's best known franchise: the *Repton* series. The first *Repton* game was programmed by 15-year-old Tim Tyler in 1985. Young Tim was inspired to create the game after reading a description of boulders and gems classic *Boulder Dash*, and the two games are superficially similar, although *Repton* has a greater emphasis on puzzles. Released later that year, *Repton 2* abandoned the original system of individual levels and was based instead around a single, huge map that had to be completed in a single sitting. The next year, *Repton 3* marked a return to the original multiple level system and included a level editor. Later releases *Around The World In 40 Screens*, *The Life Of Repton* and *Repton Thru Time* were add-on level packs for *Repton 3*. The final Beeb *Repton* game, *Repton Infinity*, took things even further by including a programming language that allowed the creation of *Repton*-type games. If that wasn't enough, versions of *Repton* were ported to the Commodore 64 and Sinclair Spectrum.

Almost every genre of game went on to be represented within the huge Superior Software catalogue, but many of the best-remembered classics fell into the 'arcade adventure' category. *Citadel* (1985) is a consummate example of the kind of flip-screen arcade adventure that Superior Software did best. Mixing the mechanics of a platform game with inventory-based puzzles, the player explores a huge castle. It's probably one of the earliest home computer games that gave the player the option of selecting between a male and female avatar. Using the eight-colour mode, graphically, the game plays to the BBC Micro's strengths, giving each location a characterful, although sometimes slightly garish, appearance. If you wanted to sum up the best elements of BBC Micro gaming, *Citadel* would be a good starting point. Distinctively, the game's loading sequence features synthesised speech that cries "Citadel! Citadel! Citadel!". This neat touch, which can also be found in *Repton 2*, served as a demonstration of one of the company's rare forays into serious software ▶

BY THE NUMBERS

4 numbered entries in the *Repton* series. But be careful as the actual content of the games varies between platform. *Ego: Repton 4* is quite a different game from the *Repton 4* game that comes with *Repton Infinity* on the BBC.

12 levels in the first *Repton* game.

18 entries in the Play It Again Sam series of compilations for the BBC Micro.

6502 processor powered the BBC Micro and the Electron among others, making the Commodore 64 the obvious target for conversions such as *Thrust* and *Bonecruncher*.

120,000 units sold in the *Repton* series on the BBC Micro, which is considered to be a lot for the platform.

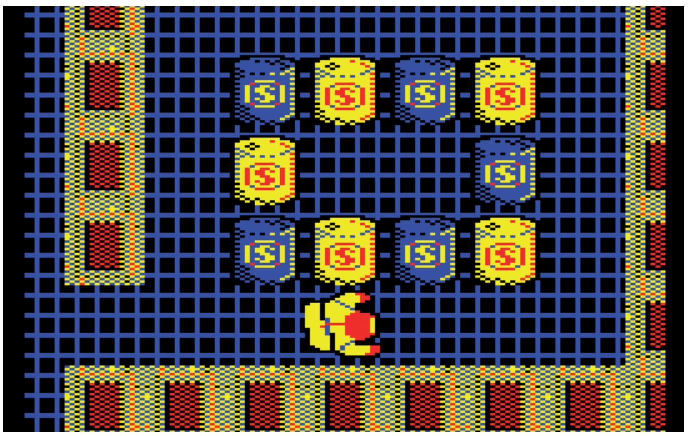
25 kilobytes was the amount of RAM that Peter Scott had left after allowing for screen memory when he converted *SimCity*. At one point, he encountered a single routine on the Amiga version that used that amount.



» [BBC Micro] *Stryker's Run*, a scrolling run-and-gun game.

TIMELINE

- **1981** ACORN COMPUTERS LAUNCHES THE BBC MICRO
- **1982** SUPERIOR SOFTWARE FORMED BY RICHARD HANSON AND JOHN DYSON
- **1983** ACORN ELECTRON RELEASED WITH AN INITIAL SUPPLY SHORTAGE
- **1985** *CITADEL* RELEASED
- **1985** THE ORIGINAL *REPTON* GAME IS RELEASED



» **[BBC Micro] *Pipeline*, another overhead perspective game.**

> **"They were always very understanding, supportive and good people to deal with"**
>
> PETER IRVIN ON WORKING WITH SUPERIOR

THE ACORN ELECTRON AND THE MASTER

Launched in 1983, but only widely available by 1984, some people wrongly consider the Acorn Electron to have been a failure, yet the machine was a moderate success. A low-cost alternative to the BBC Micro, and partially compatible, games still needed some rewriting before they would work on the Electron. Once the machine became available, almost every Superior release supported it, although the Electron version sometimes had to be curtailed. From a gaming perspective, the 1986 release of the BBC Master only offered extra memory, which few games supported.

in the form of *Speech!*, a software-based speech synthesiser.

And it seems that *Citadel* created an impression on not just the players themselves, as Tony Oakden, creator of similar arcade adventures *Quest*, *Camelot* and *Star Port*, tells us: "In the Eighties, microcomputers were appearing everywhere, so I thought that a career in computing would be a good move. I soon got interested in playing games on the Acorn Electron that I had bought for my college course, and one game in particular, Superior Software's *Citadel*, really caught my imagination. Afterwards, I wanted to play more games of the same type, but found that there weren't that many of the same quality with the same intricate puzzles and gameplay. I thought I could program a similar game, so I decided to give it a go, and a year later I sent the game to Superior on the off chance they might be interested in it. They were, and I was quite surprised and very happy."

For players who completed *Citadel*, another very similar game called *Palace Of Magic* served as an unofficial sequel. The gameplay and overall appearance is very similar to the earlier game, but the general consensus is that it doesn't quite beat the original. An official sequel did arrive in 1993, long after the BBC Micro had ceased to be a viable commercial platform. For this reason, *Citadel 2* did not receive a full release, instead being included on a compilation. *Ricochet* (1987) was a later release that carried on the flip-screen arcade adventure tradition that had begun with *Citadel*. This game added a twist in the form of the physics-based control of the main, bouncing character.

Superior Software released two compilation series for the BBC Micro: the early Superior Collection and the later Play It Again Sam series. Play It Again Sam began as a collection featuring some of the best games from the company, but later entries incorporated the games of other publishers and sometimes included a previously unreleased game as the fourth inclusion. Strangely, *Citadel* was included on Play It Again Sam 1, and *Citadel 2* was one of the games on Play It Again Sam 18, the final instalment.

In 1986, a new opportunity to add software to the catalogue presented itself. Richard Hanson elaborates: "Acorn Computers approached Superior Software and some other software companies in 1986 because it wanted to concentrate its activities on hardware rather than software. The Acornsoft label and software were of interest for two main reasons: firstly, Acornsoft and Acorn Computers, as the manufacturers of the computer, were implicitly associated with the BBC Micro, and secondly, Acornsoft had produced some very good software such as *Elite*, *Revs* and some of the early games. After presenting a business plan to Acorn, they eventually decided to award the contract to us, and it was agreed that Superior Software would republish Acornsoft's most popular games."



» **[iPhone] *Repton* still lives, having recently been converted to the iPhone.**

In addition to famous games like *Revs* – the first racing game by Geoff Crammond (*Stunt Car Racer*) – and *Elite*, the Acornsoft back catalogue also contained arcade conversions such as *Planetoid* and *Snapper*, very accurate conversions of *Defender* and *Pac-Man* respectively.

Although *Revs* remained the gold standard in serious Beeb racing games, Superior made a few arcade racing games. *Crazy Rider* is a racing bike game that encourages cheating, and *Grand Prix Construction Kit* is perhaps the only such game on the Beeb that features a track designer. *Overdrive*, a simple Formula 1 racer with no cornering at all, proved surprisingly successful.

For fast action, the Beeb was at a slight disadvantage in terms of smooth scrolling and sprite-plotting prowess compared to some other contemporary machines. However, there are some good action titles and they are mostly very colourful. Run-and-gun game *Stryker's Run* was one of the bestselling games on the platform. Assessing it now, despite the great-looking graphics, the juddering movement and flickering sprites coupled with repetitive gameplay mean that it hasn't aged as well as some of the other games. The sequel, *Codename: Droid*, took a more effective tack, scaling the graphics down by making use of the four-colour mode to improve responsiveness and adopting a more varied and tactical style of play.

Thrust (1986), created by the late Jeremy Smith, was yet another hit that mixed thoughtful gameplay with action: the key to success in the Beeb market. The player controls a hovering, rotatable craft that thrusts around increasingly complicated cavern levels while picking up objects with a tractor beam, destroying turrets and avoiding enemy fire. If that sounds like a tall order, it's because it is, and those without the

- **1986** BBC MASTER RELEASED
- **1986** SUPERIOR ACQUIRES THE RIGHTS TO THE ACORNSOFT BACK CATALOGUE, INCLUDING *ELITE*
- **1987** ACORN COMPUTERS DEBUTS A NEW MACHINE: THE ACORN ARCHIMEDES
- **1987** *ZARCH*, THE FIRST SUPERIOR SOFTWARE GAME FOR THE ARCHIMEDES, IS RELEASED
- **1988** *EXILE* RELEASED
- **1989** *REPTON INFINITY*, THE FINAL BBC MICRO/ELECTRON GAME IN THE SERIES
- **1990** *SIMCITY* MAKES IT TO THE BEEB
- **1998** ACORN COMPUTERS ANNOUNCES THAT IT IS CLOSING ITS COMPUTER MANUFACTURING DIVISION
- **2003** FIRST WINDOWS REMAKES OF CLASSIC SUPERIOR SOFTWARE GAMES RELEASED
- **2010** *IREPTON* DEBUTS FOR THE IPHONE ON APPLE'S APP STORE



» [BBC Micro] *Crazy Rider*, a racing game that rewards cheating.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Richard Hanson runs Superior Interactive today.

Chris Roberts, author of *Stryker's Run*, joined Origin Systems in the late Eighties and hit the big time when he created *Wing Commander* and its various sequels. Following this he worked on other games before directing the film version of *Wing Commander*. He has since served as a producer on various films and now runs his own video production company, Chris Roberts Productions.

Peter Irvin, co-author of *Exile*, has been active in mobile gaming. He plans to release an iPhone version.

Gary Partis runs his own company and specialises in embedded programming and firmware for hardware devices. He's married with one daughter and some tropical fish and lives near Newcastle upon Tyne.



Gary Partis



Tony Oakden

Tony Oakden has worked as a project manager and a programmer for some of the most prestigious development houses in the business including Reflections, Micro Forte and Irrational Games, where he contributed to mega projects such as *Driver*, *BioShock*, *Tribes: Vengence* and *Fallout: Tactics*. Currently, he runs a software company called Charlie Dog Games, which offers loads of free games with a somewhat retro style. He resides in Australia.

Perhaps thanks to his early interest in computer programming, **Tim Tyler**, the creator of *Repton*, has an interest in all things scientific, mathematical and mechanical. Check out his website at **timtyler.org/personal/**

Most of **Adrian Stephens**' BBC Micro games were heavily based on existing coin-op games, but subsequently, he worked on critically acclaimed games that tend towards open 3D worlds. While part of the Assembly Line, he helped to create *Interphase* (Solid Image), *Cybercon III* (US Gold) and *Stunt Island* (Disney). In 1997 he co-founded development studio Luxoflux, which created games like *Vigilante 8* and *True Crime: Streets Of LA*. Subsequently, he founded Isopod Labs, along with some of the other former Luxoflux staff, releasing a version of *Vigilante 8* that was released on Xbox Live Arcade in 2008.



Richard Hanson

ability to keep a cool head while under fire need not apply. Beyond its success on its native platform, *Thrust* was also a cross-platform success, eventually going on to be ported to most of the popular 8- and 16-bit home computers. The experience with real-time physics simulation that Jeremy gained while creating *Thrust* would later be utilised in the development of another of the greats of the classic home computer era.

The middle era

1987 saw the release of Acorn's second hardware architecture series in the form of the 32-bit Archimedes. Hardware-wise, this machine was a complete departure from the BBC Micro although, on a software level, it featured some similarities and partial compatibility. Richard Hanson summed up his initial reaction to the new machine by calling it "technically interesting and impressive; probably not destined to be as wide-ranging in appeal as the BBC Micro". Superior Software remained, largely, a BBC Micro outfit, but it did make a few high-quality releases for the Archimedes, the first of which was *Zarch*. Programmed by David Braben, the co-author of *Elite*, *Zarch* had begun as a simple demonstration game called *Lander* that he had created for Acorn. The full commercial release was a graphical tour de force that highlighted the Archie's power and prompted *ACE* magazine to run with a headline that asked if 3D graphics would become the future of gaming. A later game, *Air Supremacy*, had graphics in the mould of *Zarch* but with a greater variety of vehicles and a slightly more relaxed difficulty curve.

Inevitably, *Repton* made its way to the Arc in the form of a special version of *Repton 3* that featured better graphics and sound in addition to all of the official add-on packs for the BBC Micro version and a new game editor.

The 1988 game *Hostages* was an Infogrames conversion that Superior published as both a Beeb version built around the limitations of that platform and an Arc release that was a straight port of the ST/Amiga edition. The Archimedes conversion was carried out by Gary Partis, whose other 32-bit Acorn credit was *Ego: Repton 4*, a game that retained the expected overhead view, but otherwise deviated from the usual formula, resulting in mixed reactions from *Repton* fans. Partis worked with quite a few publishing houses and his BBC Micro releases included *Syncron*, a so-fast-it's-not-real vertically scrolling shooter; and 3D space racer *Sphere Of Destiny*. He also worked on *…And All Because*, a platform game based on the popular Cadbury Milk Tray chocolate adverts of the time. Unfortunately, the deal to secure the rights fell through and the game was shelved.

As did some of the other programmers who we spoke to, he made a point about the BBC Micro's strength as a development platform: "The fact that the BBC Micro had a built-in assembler meant that it was used as a development platform. I always abstracted hardware, and the main game code was the same on each platform. I squirted the resultant binary code to the target platform via a parallel cable."

Superior had some other hits built around a similar style to that of its most successful game, *Repton*. *Ravenskull* had a more serious tone than the other top-down arcade action puzzlers and adopted ▶



a fantasy setting. At the beginning of the game, the player was given the chance to select a character class in true RPG style, a first for the Beeb. Smooth scrolling, nice graphics and effective music rounded out a package that went on to be a big hit. *Bonecruncher* (1987) brought back some of the humour and was released on the Commodore Amiga and Commodore 64, as well as the usual Acorn machines.

Pipeline, a game in a similar vein, has a science-fiction setting, but comes with a rather macabre anecdote attached. Originally, the game was to be set on a burning oil rig, complete with a red-headed main character sprite called Red-o-Hair, a tongue-in-cheek reference to internationally renowned firefighter Red Adair. Just as the game was nearing completion, the Piper Alpha oil rig disaster occurred, killing 167 and injuring many others. The similarity between the game scenario and the real disaster was too close for comfort, so the game was relocated in space with a different back story and replaced graphics.

Welcome to Exile

Every decent platform has the odd game that defies technical limitations and blows the lid off the machine. For the BBC Micro, there is no better example of this than arcade adventure *Exile* (1988). A physics engine, in which all objects have mass? Enemies that hunt the player down using line of sight and advanced AI? Yes, we're still talking about a BBC Micro game. *Exile* is yet another arcade adventure from Superior, but one with a number of interesting innovations. Rather than being limited to moving from one room to another, the player thrusts about a huge set of caverns using a jet pack. The freedom extended to puzzle-solving too, as there was often more than one solution in what amounts to an early example of emergent, free-form gameplay.

The game was produced by two former school friends, Peter Irvin of *Starship Command* fame and Jeremy Smith, who had previously created *Thrust*. Irvin takes up the story: "Jeremy and I had been friends at school, although in different classes, and after university we thought we'd team up to develop *Exile* rather than getting a proper job! We put together a basic demo, showing how things would work – we had the spaceman flying around, teleporters, doors opening and a small map. Our agent showed the demo to some different companies and Superior Software were chosen, partly because it was the best publisher on that platform anyway."

A third friend of theirs from school, Mark Cullen, wrote the novella that was included in the package. This surprisingly well-written booklet not only established a chilling science-fiction back story, but it also set the scene by making reference to game locations and giving away clues.

As well as somehow shoehorning the game into a special Electron version, an expanded version featuring a larger screen and sampled speech was created for the BBC Master. But the story of *Exile* doesn't finish there, as it went on to be ported to the Commodore 64, Amiga, CD32 and, in an enhanced version, AGA-equipped Amigas such as the A1200. Note that these versions were published

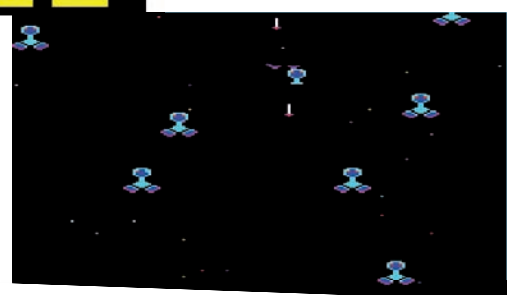


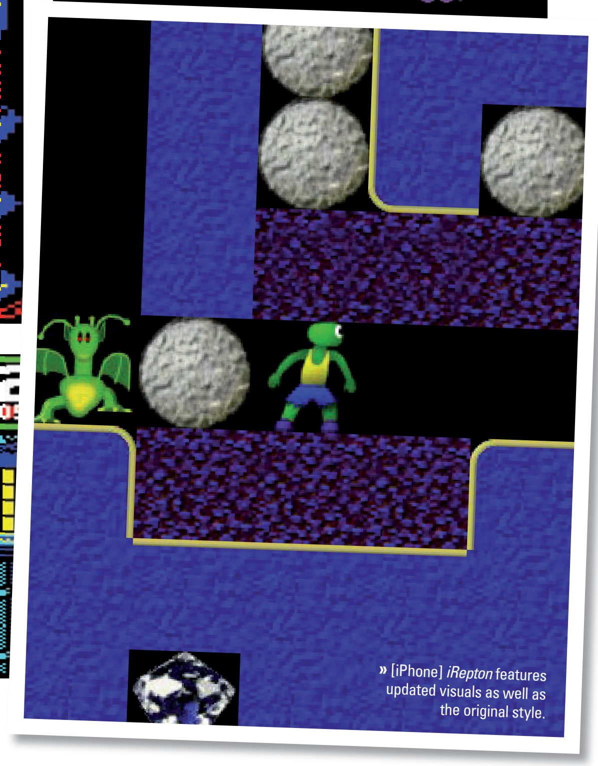
SCREEN MODES

Comparisons between the graphics capabilities of early home computers are difficult because they all tend to have their quirks and advantages. On the Electron and the BBC Micro, the main gaming modes were 320x256 with four colours and 160x256 with eight or four colours, all from a total palette of eight colours. The Beeb had no limitations in terms of where a colour could be applied on the screen, but this meant that the memory usage was high, the low-resolution eight-colour mode using 20K of the 32K total on its own. The high memory requirement also meant that the better screen modes were somewhat slow.

Some games tried to overcome the limitations by using a technique called 'colour interrupts', where the palette is redefined part of the way down the screen. Games such as *Barbarian* use this technique to have one set of four colours in the main play area and a different colour scheme in the scoreboard area, saving memory and increasing the speed. Standard BBC Micro *Elite* even runs the top of the screen in a monochrome mode while running the status area in a four-colour mode, and games such as *Exile* defined a smaller, custom screen mode, saving precious memory.







» [iPhone] *iRepton* features updated visuals as well as the original style.



» [BBC Micro] An early game called *Deathstar* looked rather similar to *Sinistar*.



» [BBC Micro] *Hostages*, a multiformat conversion.

SIX OF THE BEST



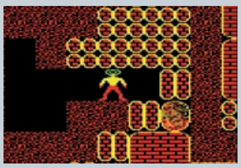
Citadel (1985)

Citadel is a consummate example of the flip-screen puzzle-platformer that became a Superior speciality. Exploration and problem-solving are nicely balanced against action, with a colourful art style giving every screen a memorable feel.



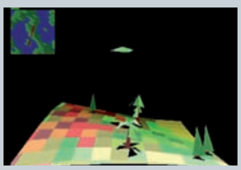
Exile (1988)

On a technical level, this free-roaming, jet pack-driven arcade adventure is probably the most impressive BBC Micro game ever made, boasting proper physics that causes objects to react according to mass and full AI routines for enemies.



Repton (1985)

The *Repton* series became the most recognisable emblem of not only Superior Software but the BBC Micro. It's a more puzzle-driven take on *Boulder Dash*, and the remakes have attempted to preserve the atmosphere of the original.



Zarch (1987)

One of the first releases for the Archimedes and eventually one of its bestselling games, *Zarch* constituted an early showcase for the hardware. This merged cutting-edge graphics with the addictive gameplay of the earlier 8-bit era.



Thrust (1986)

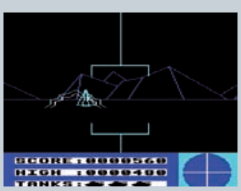
In screenshots it looks superficially similar to *Gravitar*, but in play, gravity game *Thrust* runs at a different pace. Calm progress is the only way to play *Thrust*, and the difficulty is high. Extremely rewarding when you finally make it.



Codename: Droid (1987)

The sequel to *Stryker's Run*, this rewards a considered approach. Although ostensibly an action game, it possess the characteristics of a successful Beeb game thanks to the sneaking, object manipulation and sense of exploration.

THREE TO AVOID



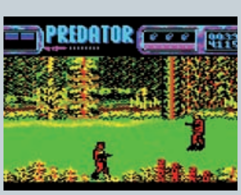
Battle Tank (1984)

It's *Battlezone*, but it's not very good. The speed is particularly poor, and it doesn't help that the BBC suffers a performance penalty for colour vector graphics. Superior should have stuck to mono green like most of the other home computer clones did.



Superior Soccer (1989)

The sprites are big, the viewing area is small and the scrolling is jerky, meaning that *Superior Soccer* lacks the smooth motion that arcade football needs. It's a shame, as the Beeb didn't have many football games and this game's shortcomings aren't due to a lack of effort.



Predator (1988)

We all know that film tie-ins can be a mixed bag. This conversion suffers from a lack of effort due to the complacency of association with a blockbuster film and poor graphics from targeting the visuals at platforms that had a different graphical style to the Beeb.



» [Archimedes] *Air Supremecy*, a nice Archimedes 3D combat game in a similar style to *Zarch*.

> **"The BBC Micro was one of the best home computers at the time, and relatively straightforward to program"** RICHARD HANSON ON WHY HE CHOSE THE BEEB

by Audiogenic, as Superior Software wasn't considered a big enough player in the 16-bit market.

Towards the end of the Eighties, 8-bit computers were declining in popularity, and, subsequently, cross-platform ports of proven hits began to play a bigger role in the Superior Software line-up. *Barbarian* (1988) is a good example of a game that had already proved successful by the time it made it to the Beeb. However, despite the best technical efforts of programmer Peter Scott (using his Dylan pseudonym), the graphical style didn't suit the Beeb's palette and ended up looking garish compared to the other versions. *Predator* (1989), a movie tie-in and cross-platform port, suffered from similar problems of garish graphics and a small viewing area.

Scott was, for a time, the porting king of the 8-bit Acorn world, and he did better given more suitable source material. His ports of *Hostages* and *The Last Ninja* were considered very good, but his finest hour was undoubtedly the version of *SimCity* that he worked on. It was a port that many people said couldn't be done, given the memory limitations of the standard Beeb, but Scott produced an excellent conversion that was, amazingly, based heavily on the Amiga version rather than the Commodore 64 edition. Sadly, according to Peter, his ports of mainstream hits outsold his labour of love conversion of *SimCity*, an outcome that influenced his decision to abandon game development.

Conclusion

As the size of the market for 8-bit games began to trail off, Superior Software faithfully continued to supply the enthusiast market. Taking into account its dozens and dozens of releases and almost exclusive devotion to publishing superb quality BBC Micro and Electron games, it's hard to think of another publisher that did so much to aid a single home computer platform. This dedication continues to the current day, as the company informed us that it can still supply boxed BBC Micro and Acorn Electron games.

Richard Hanson still runs the company, now called Superior Interactive, and has switched to producing remakes of some of the classic catalogue. For the Windows PC platform, Superior now offers downloadable editions of various entries in the *Repton* series, *Pipeline*, *Ravenskull*, *Galaforce* and *Ricochet*.

It seems that Repton has still more work to do in terms of digging through the soil and avoiding boulders, as he's now the star of his own iPhone game, *iRepton*. An iPad version and further levels are planned.

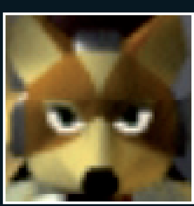
Special thanks are due to Richard Hanson, Peter Irvin, Tony Oakden and Gary Partis for their participation in this feature.

THE CLASSIC GAME

STARFOX 64

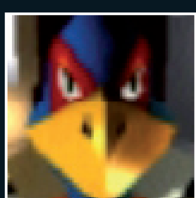


Mention into-the-screen shoot-'em-up classics and talk immediately turns to Sega's big hitters: *Space Harrier* and *After Burner*. But the absolute pinnacle of frenzied third-person blasting belongs to Nintendo. *Star Fox 64* (*Lylat Wars* in Australia and Europe) sees ace Arwing pilot Fox McCloud and his intrepid team of mercenaries battle insane monkey scientist Andross. With the help of General Pepper of the Cornerian Army, the Star Fox team must reclaim the Lylat System from Andross's minions. Cue smart bombs, loop-the-loops, and, yes, barrel rolls, all in the name of justice and profit.



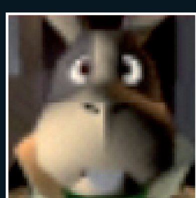
FOX McCLOUD

Took over as leader of the Star Fox team from his father, James, who had been betrayed and apparently killed by Andross. A daredevil pilot and deadeye marksman, he is unrivalled on land, sea or air.



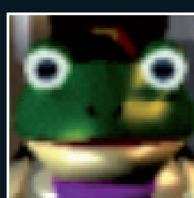
FALCO LOMBARDI

Brilliant but arrogant pilot who believes that he should be Star Fox's leader. Prepare to gnash your teeth as his stupid showing off repeatedly gets him into trouble, naturally requiring your assistance.



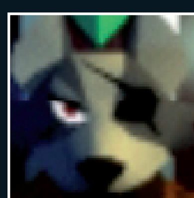
PEPPY HARE

Veteran pilot who flew alongside Fox's father during the original assault on Venom. He's full of advice on bosses' weak spots and able to use his vast experience to offer some useful hints.



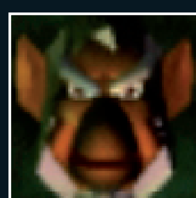
SLIPPY TOAD

Young mechanical genius who built the Landmaster tank and the Blue Marine sub. He's green in more ways than one, and often gets picked on by enemies and needs rescuing, to comic effect.



WOLF O'DONNELL

Moriarty to Fox's Holmes, Wolf leads the ruthless rival mercenary team Star Wolf. Hired by Andross to stop Star Fox, he has a grudging respect for Fox's aerial prowess, but still aims to bring him down.



ANDROSS

Driven mad by his thirst for power, Andross was exiled from his home planet of Corneria to the barren wastes of Venom. Years later, strange readings began emanating from the planet, and the Star Fox team investigated.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS

WHY IS IT A CLASSIC?



Score attack

Star Fox 64's scoring system gives it scads of replay value. At the end of each level, you are awarded a points total based on how many enemies you shot down. However, use the Arwing's lock-on laser to take down several enemies at once, and you'll get a bonus of +1 for two enemies, +2 for three enemies, and so on. Score highly enough, and you receive a medal. This deceptively simple mechanic leads to all sorts of frantic manoeuvring in search of extra points and a host of tasty unlockables, including the brutal Expert mode, which will keep you coming back for more.

BEST CHARACTER?



Pigs will fly

This accolade has to go to the sneaky, snivelling Pigma Dengar. Once a member of Star Fox, he switched sides when they reached Andross's home planet. Fox's father disappeared, and Peppy Hare barely escaped to tell of the betrayal. Now, he fights as a member of Star Wolf. Wolf O'Donnell may be a villain in the traditional, moustache-twirling sense, but even he has a sense of honour. Pigma is a proper baddie – a coward who only cares about his next pay cheque. "Too bad Dad's not here to see you FAIL!" he squeals at Fox during dogfights. What a bounder.

BEST BOSS?



Watch that right hook

In a game spilling over with awesome boss battles, any final boss needs to be something pretty special. Andross doesn't disappoint. After weaving through the Death Star-esque innards of Venom, you come face to face with a giant cackling monkey head. Dodge his swiping hands, and get ready with the brakes, or the maniacal simian will literally chew you up and spit you out. If you've failed previous missions, this head turns out to be a mechanical clone. Take the optimal route, however, and the face blasts away to reveal Andross's true form: a colossal brain with detachable eyes.

BEST MOVE?



A meme is born

"Do a barrel roll!" yells Peppy, and you'd be smart to follow his advice. Double-tapping the Z trigger or R button will make Fox execute a barrel roll to the left or right. Not only does this allow for rapid strafing, but as the Arwing spins it briefly shields itself, deflecting laser fire, Lightsaber-style. During frenzied levels like the final assault on Venom, constant spinning is your only hope of making it through the torrent of hostile ordnance. Be warned, however: bigger projectiles will pass straight through your shield, so get your swerve on.

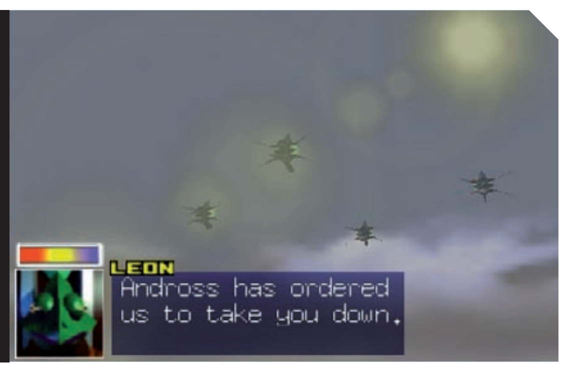
BEST STAGE?



A view from below

'The Forever Train' sees Fox driving the Landmaster tank across the rocky wastes of Macbeth, pursuing a huge supply train on its way to the enemy base. "Here come the little hyenas now!" taunts the driver in a Texan drawl, before unloading his cargo of giant boulders into your path. While the rest of the Star Fox team are caught up in a massive dogfight above your head – they'll still need your help occasionally, of course – you must play signalman. Successfully shoot a series of switches, and you make the train change track, sending it crashing into a fuel bunker.

STANDOUT MOMENT?



"Annoying bird!"

Arriving on the planet of Fortuna, the Star Fox team find Cornerian forces locked in battle with Andross's army. After enemy ships emerge from a Cornerian base, a scan reveals that they have planted a bomb. Fox is about to fly in and defuse it when four silhouettes appear in the sky, and a sneering voice crackles across the radio: "Can't let you do that, Star Fox!" Enter Wolf O'Donnell, Leon Powalski, Pigma Dengar and Andrew Oikonny – alias: Star Wolf. With the clock ticking, you must shoot them down then deactivate the bomb before the base blows sky high.

What the press said… ages ago

IGN 8.7/10

"The branching system, loads of secret paths, intelligently designed levels, originally designed bosses, and multiplayer gaming all add up to overcome the game's minor weaknesses. If anything can be said, *Star Fox 64* demonstrates that shooters are more alive now than ever."

CVG 9/10

"Reminiscent of the 16-bit edition, but even more stunning. The bosses are incredible, and the intro sequence is as good as any we've seen. I could waffle for ages but, at the end of the day, it can be summed up with: Buy it now. You won't be disappointed."

What we think

Sure, it won't suit all tastes, but with its fluid gameplay, varied star system and quality voice acting, *Star Fox 64* has plenty to offer. Chuck Rumble Pak support and a simultaneous four-player Versus into the mix, and you've got a game that still feels fresh 13 years later.



IN THE KNOW

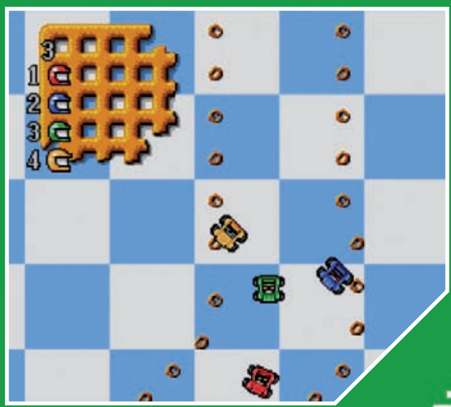
- **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- **DEVELOPER:** NINTENDO EAD
- **RELEASED:** 1997
- **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £10/1,000 WII POINTS

THE MAKING OF...

Micro Machines

SCALE MINIATURES



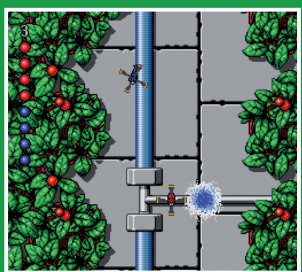


David Crookes talks to the makers of the original Micro Machines to relive the feeling of racing around a breakfast table



IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** CODEMASTERS
» **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
» **PLATFORM:** CD-I, GAME BOY, GAME GEAR, MASTER SYSTEM, MEGA DRIVE, NES, PC, SNES
» **RELEASED:** 1991
» **GENRE:** TOP-DOWN RACER
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £10 (NES VERSION)







» Codemasters celebrates as *Micro Machines* on the Mega Drive goes straight to number one in the Gallup charts. L-R: Paul Adams (graphic artist), Shan Savage (creative design manager), Dave Thompson (software producer), Brian Hartley (graphic artist), Kirsty Hewitt (sales and marketing), Richard Darling (director), Paul Ranson (software producer) and Andrew Graham (programmer).

Creating a game is not easy. Andrew Graham should know. When he was programming *Micro Machines*, he had to deal with thousands of bugs – literally. "By day we would have plagues of wasps once they had discovered our sugary snacks," he confides. "And by night we had to make sure the office doors were sealed shut because there were clouds of flies from the nearby swamp swarming all over the the windows."

Micro Machines was one of Codemasters' early attempts to produce a full-price game. During the Eighties, the Warwickshire-based software house was the darling of the budget scene, peddling games to kids for mere pennies – or, most typically, £1.99 to £2.99 – and knocking out a range of 'simulators', which didn't, in retrospect, actually give you a feeling of being there. But if Codemasters had one thing going for it, it was the immense pleasure that gamers got when playing its games.

For anyone who has picked up a joypad to play *Micro Machines*, that feeling of fun will be familiar. Released in 1991 on the NES, the top-down racer drew direct inspiration from Galoob's toy line and never for one minute billed itself as a realistic drive. Unless, of course, you frequently race around bowls of breakfast cereal or across a pool table, in which case this is about as accurate a representation of doing those things as you will ever hope to find.

Andrew Graham was the man tasked with coding the project. He was familiar with Codemasters, having worked with his brother on a few conversions of Spectrum games to the Commodore 64. He had also proven to be something of a whizz at coding for the Amiga and Atari ST, so when Codemasters asked him to produce a NES game – a conversion of the Oliver twins' *Treasure Island Dizzy* in 1989 – he had to admit that the Nintendo machine was rather more alien to him.

"The Darling brothers who owned Codemasters mentioned that they were hoping to develop games for the NES," he recalls. "I have to admit that I had barely heard of the NES at that time, and they had to explain to me that it was massive in the USA, and it was a big market that they wanted to break into."

Graham's first experience with a NES followed contact by Ted Carron, an often-overlooked gaming figure who started his career producing *Rugby Simulator* for the C64 and Atari ST but, more significantly, invented the Game Genie, a hardware device that allowed players to change a game's settings and alter aspects such as difficulty or number of lives. Carron also produced a development kit for the NES and one was duly dispatched to Graham.

"A big package arrived at our house in Blairgowrie in Scotland, and with Ted Carron instructing me on the phone I carefully assembled the various boxes and wires of his first dev kit for the NES," explains Graham. "It involved a PC, which connected to a C64, which connected to a box of electronics, which finally connected to the NES. Anyway, it worked, and I started work on the NES version of *Treasure Island Dizzy*."

Having impressed with that conversion, Graham – who was still at university in Strathclyde – was later persuaded by David Darling to take a year out, much to the annoyance of his tutor, who believed that he would never return – Graham proved him wrong and went on to complete his degree. He moved south to the Codemasters offices. "There were a number of developers working at Codemasters, and we each started

CD-i woes

Ports of *Micro Machines* continued years after the original game was launched for the NES. In 1994, versions for the PC, CD-i and SNES were released, and a Game Boy game followed in 1995. Ashley Hogg worked on the CD-i port, having been brought in to help with audio programming on the Mega Drive version.

"For me, the hardest part was at the end of the CD-i project, as once we started testing on consumer machines, we found a number of problems that only occurred on those machines," Hogg recalls. "Turnaround times were very long. These were the days of generating a CD ISO onto an external SCSI hard drive, walking to the other side of the building to use the only single-speed CD writer in the company – they cost a fortune back then – waiting an hour to burn a disc, then testing the disc to discover within seconds that there were still problems! Also, CD-Rs cost about £15 each then too. My office was full of ones that didn't work right."

to work on new NES games on Ted's svelte new development system," he says.

At the time, the Oliver twins were working on a *Dizzy* game, Gavin Raeburn was working on *Ultimate Stuntman*, and the Falcus brothers were working on a game called *Big Nose The Caveman*. Graham started producing a game called *California Buggy Boys*. "I thought that people liked beaches, and *Baywatch* was big at the time," he laughs. "I also really liked an arcade game at the time called *Power Drift*, where you were racing buggies. We had put a few levels together where players were racing up and down a beach, jumping over dunes, splashing through the surf, avoiding the sunbathers. My brother and his friends helped me with the art."

California Buggy Boys was a simple race around a track. It was showcased at a consumer show in Las Vegas with multiple NES consoles connected

The first major impact of the deal was physical. Within days, Graham's desk was covered with hundreds of tiny vehicles sent over by the toy manufacturer. "We were hoping to have a good selection of the actual toy cars available to play in the game," he recalls. "Originally I had thought that we would theme the environments to the cars – so that the racing car would be on an actual race track and so on."

Eventually, after some discussion, the team decided to work with household environments. "I was worried that it was a risky move, because kids who are playing with the toys are imagining them in exciting environments – maybe they don't want to be reminded that they are just pushing them around the kitchen floor," says Graham, who was aged 20 when he worked on the game. "Anyway, of course there was no problem, and the environments gave loads of opportunities for interesting track designs."

> "It was risky, because kids who are playing with the toys are imagining them in exciting environments"

together in an early form of networked gaming. Graham had a couple of levels working where you could splash through the sea and bump over the sand dunes. "I wonder how popular it would have been, given that you needed to get several NES consoles and TVs in the same room in order to play it," he muses. "Also, the edge-of-the-screen mechanics weren't present in that version, and it was a simple race round the track. It was still pretty impressive for the time, though."

Shortly after, Codemasters struck a licensing deal for the Game Genie with San Francisco-based Galoob Toys. It was suggested that Codies produce a title based on its biggest line of toys: *Micro Machines*.

"The Darlings thought we could convert the work done on *California Buggy Boys*," says Graham. "Perhaps I was suspicious of this at first, having invested so much time and effort into the theme, but I'm sure I must have realised pretty quickly that it would be much easier to market a game in the US with such a strong brand."

Micro Machines' main artist Paul Perrot began to change *California Buggy Boys*' graphics to household environments, starting with the school desks. It was a tough job and Perrot did the bulk, although some external graphic artists were involved and another artist, Toby Eglesfield, produced a couple of the level graphics. Jon Menzies programmed the front end.

There was no middleware back in the days of the NES, but the team used Deluxe Paint and a cross compiler running on a PC. "It was pure luxury for me, because I had previously been programming directly on my C64 or Amiga," recalls Graham. Still, everything had to be assembled from eight-by-eight character blocks, with a maximum of 256 per level. "I had a system, which I wrote on the Amiga, which converted lists of Deluxe Paint brushes into character sets, and told you how many characters you had used," says Graham. "It was a constant battle to keep the character count down. The household environments made this problem even worse. At that scale, ordinary objects are big, and take a

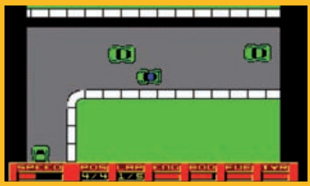
6 Micro Machines Alternatives



Super Sprint

■ **Publisher: Atari** ■ **Developer: In-house** ■ **Platforms: Amstrad CPC, Arcade, Atari ST, C64, NES, Spectrum** ■ **Year: 1986**

This is the game that inspired many an overhead racer. Yes, it lacked complexity – it took place on a single non-scrolling screen and you just had to win three laps – but reaching race 85 to finish the game wasn't easy. As you progressed, more obstacles would appear, and you really did have to start customising your car if you wanted to retain any hope.



Supercars

■ **Publisher: Gremlin Graphics** ■ **Developer: Magnetic Fields** ■ **Platforms: Amiga, Amstrad CPC, Atari ST, C64, MSX, NES, Spectrum** ■ **Year: 1990**

Quality screeched from the tyres of Gremlin's *Supercars*. There were nine tracks over three stages and the ability to bolt on some juicy extras to your vehicle. The game gets progressively more difficult in the way you'd expect, and while not amazingly fast, remains a title that you should return to.



Run The Gauntlet

■ **Publisher: Ocean** ■ **Developer: In-house** ■ **Platforms: Amiga, Amstrad CPC, Atari ST, C64, Spectrum** ■ **Year: 1989**

Now to a game with no cars but hovercraft, speed boats, jet skis, buggies and many more. And you need them because *Run The Gauntlet* was a game of three parts: road racing, water racing and an assault course. Up to three people could play against the CPU and each other, but it was frustrating. You really had to master the controls.



Nitro

■ **Publisher: Psygnosis** ■ **Developer: In-house** ■ **Platforms: Amiga, Atari ST** ■ **Year: 1990**

Created for the Amiga and Atari ST by Psygnosis, *Nitro* was a thrilling ride of up to three players in which you created your car and tried to crack all 32 levels. If you ran out of gas, though, it would be game over before you knew it. With four different environments, there was some solid variety, and having lots of obstacles to manoeuvre around cranked up the fun.



Super Skidmarks

■ **Publisher: Acid Software** ■ **Developer: Guildhall Leisure Services** ■ **Platforms: Amiga, CD32, Mega Drive** ■ **Year: 1995**

Extremely well-received on its launch and a wonderful blast today, *Super Skidmarks* let players race a wide variety of cars. Up to eight vehicles would take part – Amigas could be linked up – and you could even drive some strange contraptions – like a cow! A crazy game, for sure, and 24 circuits ensured that no boredom would set in.



Badlands

■ **Publisher: Atari** ■ **Developer: In-house** ■ **Platforms: Amiga, Amstrad CPC, Atari ST, C64, PC, Spectrum** ■ **Year: 1989**

Comparisons were inevitably made between *Badlands* and *Super Off Road*, but both had their roots in *Super Sprint*. *Badlands* took racing into a post-apocalyptic environment, in which cannons would shoot at cars to try to grind them to a halt. The game had colourful backgrounds and was well-received by many reviewers.

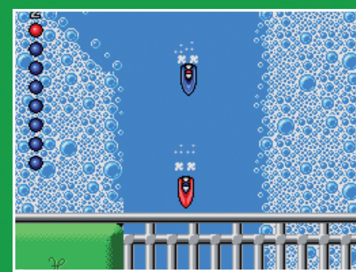
DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

TREASURE ISLAND DIZZY
SYSTEM: NES
YEAR: 1989

ADVANCED SKI SIMULATOR
SYSTEM: AMIGA, ATARI ST
YEAR: 1990

PSYCHO PINBALL
SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE, PC
YEAR: 1994





lot of graphics. Anything round or irregular required lots of unique characters, so we had to be careful about the kind of things that we would include."

Coming up with suitable locations for races was a challenge in itself. The problem was designing something recognisable from the in-game distance, and which had enough obstacles to make the tracks interesting.

"Often shorter tracks are more fun than longer ones, which rules out a lot of potential locations," explains Graham. "A lot of household surfaces are too small, or are too cluttered. Unlike other racing games, the tracks in *Micro Machines* were fairly open, and there was plenty of room to move."

The main strength of *Micro Machines* was both its simplicity – "We did end up with a lot of options in the finished products but I think we put in quick-start options," says Graham – and its multiplayer. Gamers could not knock their opponent off the edge of the screen by speeding away and leaving them behind without it having a detrimental effect on their own experience, so the distance ahead was reduced. Graham found it near-impossible to re-create the exact multiplayer feel in single-player, however.

"The AI, by today's standards, is embarrassingly basic," he says. "I knew the main strength of the game was as a multiplayer game, but we did our best to put a single-player game in there as well, although it was always going to be second best. I think in *Micro Machines* we even tried to do an AI-controlled opponent for the edge-of-the-screen play mode, which was really boring to race against. The fun is all about learning the track, and knowing you are playing against another human opponent who is also trying to learn the track, and trying to outwit him by braking and speeding up at strategic points. With an AI opponent, he will just trundle round and there is none of the cut and thrust."



» Ashley Routledge worked with Dave Saunders on the production of the Game Gear version.

Micro Machines' AI essentially consisted of invisible arrows, which pointed in the direction that the vehicles should move. If the AI cars became lost, they would be instructed to follow the arrows back to the track. Graham – who now works full-time as an AI programmer and lives in Mallorca with his girlfriend – still believes that it would be extremely difficult to create a good *Micro Machines* opponent with today's technology and techniques.

"I would guess that it will never be possible to have an AI opponent that is as much fun as a human, simply because it isn't human and you can't have a laugh with it. With human opponents you are constantly trying to outwit one another, and you are learning from one another, whereas the AI opponent would need to have a pre-programmed repertoire of strategies, which would be gradually unveiled in order to give the impression of a learning process. I don't think we are quite at a point yet where the AI would be able to learn driving strategies from the players."

As the game neared completion, a major bug became apparent: if the player hit reverse instead of accelerate when they were on the starting line, the game crashed. The problem was down to a hardware bug: "To fix it, we had to make the hardware wait for a certain address to appear on the address bus. We then swapped the data byte that appeared on the ROM with another byte."

But the biggest problem of all was the lack of support from Nintendo. The console manufacturer wanted the game halted because it was unlicensed. Nintendo sued Galoob because it opposed the sale of the Game Genie, and sales were halted in America until the courts found in Galoob's favour. But all of the furore and complications over unlicensed products meant that sales of the NES version of *Micro Machines* were not as good as Codemasters had hoped.

Other versions of the original *Micro Machines* followed, among the most successful being for the Mega Drive. "By the time I started on the project, it was obvious that the game was going to be successful," says artist Brian Hartley. "The NES version was already proving to be very

A to Z of Micro Machines

A is for Absolutely Brilliant. It was Codemasters' catchphrase and it was written large across the loading screen. Boss Richard Darling played the game and said: "It's the best we've ever made."

B is for Budget. Codemasters was always seen as a budget house, knocking out cheap and cheerful titles. *Micro Machines* changed the perception of the company.

C is for *California Buggy Boys*. The Codies were working on a top-down racer set on a beach but the game was scrapped and used as the basis for *Micro Machines*.

D is for Direction. The game world was covered with invisible arrows pointing in the direction where the car should drive.

E is for Experience. If one player was better than the other, it was possible to handicap him to make things fairer. Annie, Mike or Walter had this option in the original game.

F is for Franchise. *Micro Machines* has been one hell of a successful franchise for Codemasters, with more than 5 million copies of the game shifted over the years.

G is for Game Genie. Codemasters devised the cheat system, Game Genie, distributed by Galoob in the US. When Galoob wanted a game based on its miniature cars, the Codies were the natural choice of partners…

H is for Household Objects. The hallmark of the *Micro Machines* series was the ability to zoom around everyday objects, dodging anything from pencil sharpeners to drops of egg.

I is for Infogrames. Infogrames grabbed the licence for one game – *Micro Machines* for the PS2, Xbox and Game Boy Advance – in 2002, publishing it under the Atari brand.

J is for J-Cart. Gamers playing *Micro Machines 2: Turbo Tournament* could use Codemasters' J-Cart, a cartridge with two control ports that, with pad-sharing, allowed up to eight players to compete.

K is for Keeping Up. We're competitive beasts so it was great to see the *Micro Machines V3* Hall of Fame on Codemasters' website, letting you submit your Time Trial or Test Drive times.

L is for Licence. *Micro Machines* was based on a popular line of toys by Galoob, later bought by Hasbro. Hasbro received a significant royalty for every copy sold.

M is for Midway. *Micro Machines 64 Turbo* was developed by Codemasters and published by Midway for the Nintendo 64. It was an enhanced port of *Micro Machines V3*.

N is for Nintendo. *Micro Machines* was an unlicensed game and it could also run via the Aladdin Game Enhancer. Nintendo, understandably, wasn't very happy.

O is for Oddballs. You could play as one of 11 different characters, each with his or her own skill level and personality.

P is for PlayStation. In 2000, Codemasters produced a *Micro Machines* spin-off for the PSone and Game Boy Color called *Micro Maniacs*, with runners instead of vehicles.

Q is for QA. *Micro Machines* wasn't put before QA testers, so a bug spotted late in the day – hitting reverse instead of accelerate on the starting line caused the game to crash – resulted in mass panic among the development personnel.

R is for Retail. The hassle surrounding the Nintendo/Galoob lawsuit meant sales of *Micro Machines* on the NES were relatively poor. Other versions fared much better.

S is for Scale. One of the major issues was keeping things to scale – household objects tend to be big in comparison to *Micro Machines* vehicles and were graphics-hungry too.

T is for Tracks. *Micro Machines* had a wealth of top tracks, from a breakfast table to a roll in the sand. *Micro Machines 2* on the PC and Mega Drive had a track creator.

U is for Unlicensed. Due to *Micro Machines* being unlicensed, the game did not carry the Nintendo Seal of Quality. That didn't stop it from being absolutely brilliant, though.

V is for Vehicles. There were lots of cool little vehicles including cars, choppers and boats – eight in all for the original game plus an unlockable bonus.

W is for Wi-Fi. Aah! Modern tech! ("Grab your P45!" - Ed) PSP owners can relive *Micro Machines* with up to four players via a wireless network connection.

X is for X-Factor. All of the *Micro Machines* versions received high scores but the Game Gear original received the highest – a near-perfect 98% in *Mean Machines*.

Y is for Your Friends. Without doubt, the very reason why *Micro Machines* was such a thrilling and long-lasting ride was the ability to play the excellent multiplayer modes.

Z is for Zap. In 1996, Codemasters released a special military edition. Cue tanks, choppers and boats, and some stirring sounds.



addictive, and there was no reason why the Mega Drive version should be any less playable. A lot of the success of the game, I think, came from the simple gameplay – nothing was overly complicated and pretty much anyone could pick it up and play it."

Each team had been chosen for their respective strengths, and they were given the freedom to do what they wanted with the game. Hartley had been at Codemasters since 1989 when its offices in Southam were little more than the Darlings' house, some out-buildings and a couple of portable cabins. At the time when the original NES version of the game was being made, he was finishing off *The Ultimate Stuntman*, also for the NES, but he is modest about how he came to become involved with the Mega Drive version. "As is the case with most studios, the teams are usually made up of anyone who happens to be free at the right time," he says. "I'm guessing this is what happened when the Mega Drive version was announced – either the original team were unavailable or, more likely, they didn't fancy making the same game all over again. So it fell to me to re-create the graphics and Charlie Skilbeck took on the coding."

The Mega Drive team tightened up the handling, giving a more 'on-rails', grippy feel. In terms of art, a lot of what was needed was nothing more than redrawing the existing graphics. "Sometimes this would involve simply adding colour to existing stuff," says Hartley, "but in most cases it was easier to create brand new graphics based on what had already been done. There were also extra bits like adding more rotations to the vehicle



» [Mega Drive] The series' eclectic cast all had their own unique attributes.

"Micro Machines was easily the most financially rewarding game I've ever worked on"

sprites to make the movement smoother. 3D hadn't been invented back then, so all of this work would have been done in DPaint or Deluxe Animator, then saved onto a floppy and given to the programmer."

There wasn't a great deal for the Mega Drive team to do in terms of the actual mechanics of the game, as the design decisions had already been made when the original NES version had been designed. "Having said that, I guess a lot of games back then were a lot simpler and easier to pick up – very much a case of switch it on and press start," adds Hartley. And yet he sees the Mega Drive version as an improvement: "As far as I can remember, this was all ironed out in the NES version and was probably a result of trial and error."

The Mega Drive project was fairly straightforward and the team was left to crack on and get the job done. The only input from the makers of the *Micro Machines* toys was the keenness to get the logos just right – or at least as good as they could with the pixel resolution they had.

"The art style was pretty much already known, and even though we had a lot more to work with than the original NES team, it was still fairly restrictive," recalls Hartley. "The only real considerations from an art point of view involved deciding on colour schemes, now that we had all those extra RGBs to play with. We decided to keep it fairly cartoony, so as not to differ too much from the original. This led to a fairly fun use of colour."

Hartley also worked on the CD-i version, coded by Ashley Hogg. Surprisingly, given the rave reviews of the Mega Drive game, Hartley was rather unfazed. "At the time it didn't seem like such a big deal," he says. "The games industry was very different back then and there was still that sense that anyone in the industry could be involved in a hit game and make a lot of money. Sadly for most people working in the industry now, those days are long gone. *Micro Machines* was easily the most financially rewarding game I've ever worked on, and, in the 20 years I've been in the games industry, is probably the one game that I've worked on that people have actually heard of. Although nowadays I tend to hear things like, 'My dad used to play that when he was a kid!', which is a bit depressing."



» [NES] The AI in single-player wasn't amazingly complex, but it still made for a fun drive.

The team working on the Game Gear version of the original decided against the 'on-rails' feel of the Mega Drive game, and wanted to keep the original drifting. The Game Gear version was created by artist and coder Ashley Routledge and programmer Dave Saunders – two public domain demo experts who went on to create a host of C64 games, including top-down racing game *Slicks*. They accessed the Mega Drive graphics and made the necessary adjustments to squeeze them into a smaller screen. The game was programmed from scratch so that it could run at 60fps.

"I was still making C64 games with Dave when I became involved," remembers Routledge. "We'd worked for many publishers including Codemasters and had recently finished a top-view racing game called *Slicks*, which reviewed really well. Codemasters asked us to move up to their offices in Warwickshire to work on *Micro Machines* not long after that. After a quick visit, we were impressed with the setup there, the great bunch of developers and their attitude towards games development, so a deal was quickly struck and we moved up to begin work."

The Game Gear version was produced at the same time as the Mega Drive development. With access to the Mega Drive assets, the challenge was how to keep as much of the detail as possible with much less storage space on the cartridge and in the console's memory. After solving the issue, they went on to make *Micro Machines 2* for the Game Gear in the same way.

"I loved the whole concept," confesses Routledge. "I was

How the racetracks were inspired

One of the hallmarks of *Micro Machines* was the wacky tracks that you would have to race around. But how were they thought up? "Well, we needed to create recognisable household environments," explains Andrew Graham. "It did mean there was some repetition because of the limitations of the graphic capabilities and a limit to what we could include, but in later versions of the game, where we had more freedom with the graphics, there was frequently a tension between the realism of the environment and the playability. We were always looking for household environments with large, flat, smooth areas with occasional recognisable obstacles. Drop-offs as hazards, and jumps or bridges across chasms were good as well. So tables were big favourites."

Since a lot of household surfaces are too small, or are too cluttered, the designers had to put in some thought. "That's why there are plenty of colossal tables, lake-sized baths and kitchens with acres of work surfaces. Usually it doesn't really matter because you only ever see a little bit of it at a time. There have been some hint books published, though – they did some cool ones in Japan – which show the entire tracks, in all their disproportionate glory."

Rogues' Gallery

The original game had eight vehicles – plus a bonus car if you proved your worth



Powerboat
Bath time has never been so much fun. Use the powerboat to splash through waves in the tub.



Jeep
Our favourite. Get in the Jeep and avoid getting egg on your wheels as you jaunt around the breakfast table.



Warrior
Time to get nuts – or at least get around them – while you're racing across a work desk, trying not to blow a fuse.

> "When I look at the legacy, I can't help but be proud. It was a dream come true, and I am chuffed to bits"

already a big fan of racing games like *Super Sprint* in the arcades and *RC Pro-Am* on the NES so was immediately won over with the addictive gameplay and drift-style vehicle handling that Codemasters had previously come up with for the original NES version. My opinion didn't change when I started work on the game either. It was a brilliant atmosphere at Codemasters around that time and we all knew that we had something special in *Micro Machines* throughout its development."

Fitting everything in from the Mega Drive version was a monumental task and it required a lot of redrawing artwork at lower resolutions and with fewer colours. The biggest design issue, though, was the screen size. Since it was so much smaller, both in terms of size and resolution, it meant you simply couldn't see far enough ahead to take corners at top speed. "We spent a lot of time tweaking the camera movement to make sure the vehicle was positioned as far back as possible, letting the player see the track ahead depending on how fast they were travelling, which was fairly complex having to deal with the vehicle cornering and drifting but ensuring the view ahead was showing the upcoming track," Routledge explains.

But that wasn't the only consideration. If there was one platform that needed to be very much pick-up-and-play, it was the Game Gear. It was important that gamers didn't have to wade through lots of options and could just get on with playing. "This approach just fit the game perfectly, and is something I've always believed in – having menus set up with the fewest choices needed," says Routledge. "There's always a way to streamline the path from loading up the game to actually playing. It still annoys me today when I see games that have too many menus and unnecessary choices. Growing up, I was a huge arcade game fan too, which I guess helped in learning how to cut through the boring bits, with arcade machines being designed as the ultimate in pick-up-and-play to ensure that the player puts another coin in as soon as possible."

Given all this fevered development of the franchise, the various teams had little to do with each other. If anyone was at the centre of development, however, it was Andrew Graham. "I remember one chat with Andrew about the vehicle handling. The Mega Drive team had tightened up the handling but I really wanted to keep the original drifting from the NES version. Andrew was pleased with that, so we set up the vehicles to behave more like the NES original."

Routledge and Saunders thought long and hard about the multiplayer aspect and how best to implement it on a Sega Game Gear. They came up with the innovative way of having people play on the same handheld: two people would hold one end of the console each, with the machine sideways and one player using the buttons to steer while the other used the D-pad.

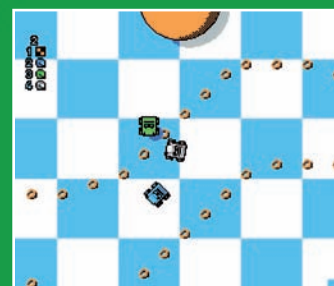
"Multiplayer was something we wanted in the game from the start. Having traditional linked-up multiplayer was an obvious choice – although quite difficult to get working at the time. Our solution worked brilliantly – better than we'd hoped – so it quickly became a finished part of the game."

The multiplayer proved the hardest part. The team had many problems with the game losing sync, but they eventually got it working perfectly. Routledge remains unsure as to what the easiest part was – but he feels that it was probably tweaking and testing the vehicle-handling code once it was finished. "That was the most enjoyable part anyway," he laughs.

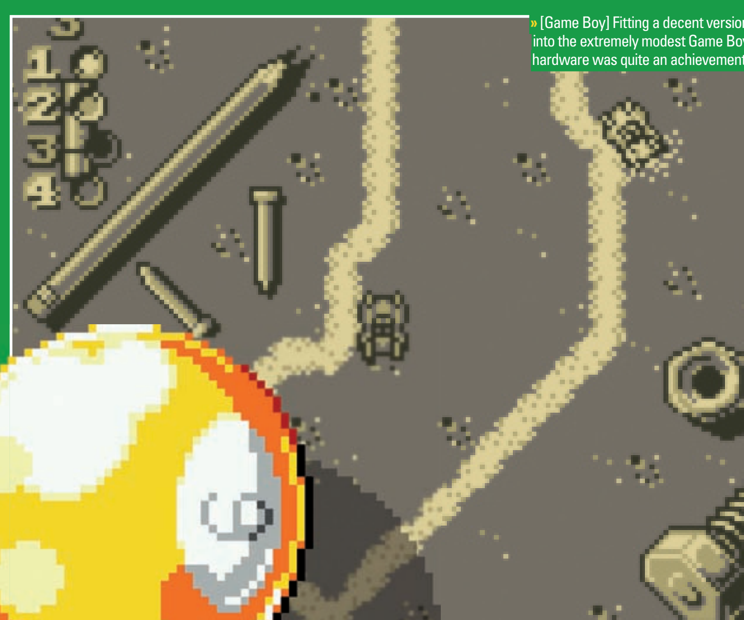
The Game Gear version received the highest review scores of all – 98% in *Mean Machines*. "It was amazing and it made all the effort so worthwhile," says Routledge.

It was also a hit with the game testers, who got into trouble because they were playing the game non-stop,

The top five



Kitchen Table
For us, nothing marks out *Micro Machines* in quite the same way as the kitchen table circuit. Splotches of egg slow the Jeeps down and half-eaten waffles and a few oranges knock around the table cloth. This track doesn't have a huge assortment of obstacles, granted, but it's perfect to get some speed going, and the colourful graphics and the sheer familiarity and humour of the backdrop makes it a memorable one. One of the big dangers is going so fast that you don't turn in time and go straight off the edge.



» [Game Boy] Fitting a decent version into the extremely modest Game Boy hardware was quite an achievement.



Sports Car
Dodge pencil sharpeners and ride over rulers as you take control of a miniature race across a school desk.



Rufftrux
Win three races on the trot and you get a chance to whizz around in a time trial in a cool Rufftrux vehicle.



Turbo Wheels
The little dune buggies are at home on the beach, tearing up the sand and avoiding pools of water.





Chopper
It's time to venture into the great outdoors and manoeuvre your helicopter over the patio and shrubs.



Formula One
We can't see the link ourselves, but dodging balls on a billiard table sure beats a spurt around Monaco.

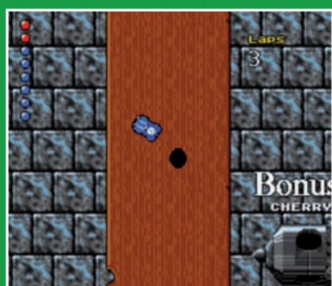


Tank
Well, you're in a tank, so what do you expect to do? Shoot your opponent if they get ahead. Yeah!

tracks from the series



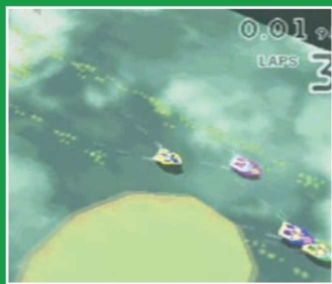
Billiard Table
From the first tight bend, which saw many a player almost fly into the pocket, the billiard table was a fight to the finish. Strategically placed balls ensured that a neck-and-neck race would force duelling players into a game of chicken – there was no way of getting two cars to squeeze through a tiny gap between balls. One part pointed you straight into a pocket, only to bring you out on another part of the table. Then you're racing under the cue, across a playing card, over the ridge and hoping not to plummet to the floor, with lots of space to whizz around.



Work Desk
The second *Micro Machines* built on the original – and introduced Violet Berlin as a character! It got you off to a flying start with the race around sets of tools on the work desk. Called 'Toolbox Terror', the track had improved graphics on the original and some lovely quirks such as a 'Botch' drill, which threatened to knock you off the table despite having just got round a hair-raising corner. The path was marked by screws and nails and, being one of the first track encounters in *MM2*, it lay the foundations for continuing small car fun.



Tiny Treehouse
Although the second *Micro Machines* game had many great tracks – moving across sponges in a sink, the constant hopping over water in the flower power setting of 'Garden Jumps' or the short race around a toilet pan – the tiny treehouse gets us all nostalgic today because of the images it evokes. Little sweets litter the floor, which takes us back to our childhood, but it's one mean track with some nasty turns, missing floorboards and sections slightly obscured by a tree branch. It makes for an exhilarating ride. For us, at any rate.



Pond
One of the most memorable moments in *Micro Machines V3* came when racing across the pond. You get to a bit where there is a floating lily pad that puts you into a raging battle as you attempt to nudge your competitors into the water. The third game had a lot of 3D updates of old favourites, too, from a pool table to a dirty, food-ridden dinner table. But as with all of the tracks, a lot of the memories are subjective. You remember the immense fights you had with competitors as you fly around, and it's those that stick out the most.

even when they were supposed to be testing other games. A lot of the programmers would join them just to play the multiplayer game for fun.

The *Micro Machines* story did not end there. Due to the immense success of the first version, sequels and spin-offs were inevitably produced, and that meant the developers had to imagine all kinds of scenarios on which the little cars could drive. The second game, *Micro Machines 2: Turbo Tournament*, was released for the Mega Drive, SNES, Game Gear and PC. It featured helicopters and hovercraft and some new characters, adding more girls in particular. The Mega Drive version came out in 1994, and in 1996 an updated version with new tracks was launched. A second exclusive Mega Drive title, *Micro Machines Military*, was released in the same year.

In 1997, *Micro Machines V3* was put out on the Sony PlayStation and a year later for the PC. It also arrived in a more limited form on the Game Boy Color, which lacked the 3D graphics that defined the bigger versions' move into the 32-bit era.

"Over the years I think we covered pretty much every horizontal surface we could think of," laughs Graham. "On *Micro Machines V3* we also tried to think of locations where there would be interesting interactions with the environment, and where there was enough depth to show off the new-fangled 3D technology in its best light."

Graham was the designer and lead programmer for *Micro Machines V3*. He was also the designer for *Micro Maniacs*, which sadly didn't do so well, even though it was a really fun game developed by an excellent team. It replaced the vehicles with running characters that could use transport ranging from jet skis to bees. "It would have been nice to have had an opportunity to do a *Micro Maniacs* sequel on something with more grunt like the PS2, where we could have learnt from the mistakes in the first one," says Graham. "There were some really fun tracks where the characters would collect a power-up and they were all suddenly driving around in tanks. I think we could have done more of that kind of thing, where it felt more like the original *Micro Machines*."

Another game in the series, simply entitled *Micro Machines* and published by Atari, was released for the PS2 in 2002, alongside the Xbox and Game Boy Advance, attempting to stick closely to the original's premise, and in 2006, *Micro Machines V4* was launched with a wealth of courses and a track editor. It ended up being released across the PS2, PSP, PC and Nintendo DS.

But without that first game, none of this would have been possible. The original game may not have performed as well as expected but it helped push the Game Genie – "I would say the games were something of a sideshow, though," says Graham. "The Game Genie was the main attraction for the distributors in the USA." – and the game's popularity has endured to this day. *Micro Machines* became a major franchise for Codemasters and a flagship title. "When I look at the legacy," concludes Graham, "I can't help but be proud. It was a dream come true at the time, and I am still chuffed to bits."

SAME NAME DIFFERENT GAME

When going by that front cover simply isn't enough



Case 8: Alien 3

■ **FEATURED SYSTEMS:** ARCADE, GAME BOY, GAME GEAR, MASTER SYSTEM, MEGA-CD, MEGA DRIVE, NES, PC, SNES ■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1993

The movie of *Alien 3* is remembered by filmgoers as being the one without any guns in it. So imagine our surprise when, in 1993, we clapped eyes on the game adaptations and saw Ripley peppering and cooking Xenomorphs with Pulse Rifle bullets and flamethrower… flames. Even more surprising, however, were the different versions of the game that appeared, most memorably the two wildly differing 16-bit console iterations. Take a look…

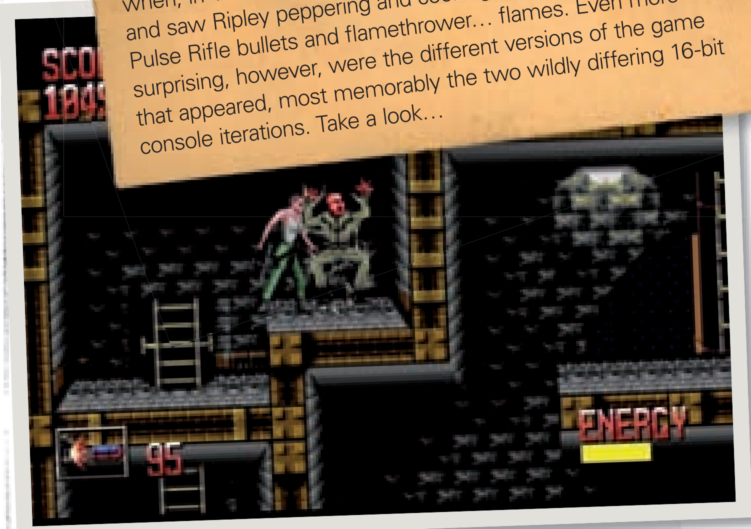


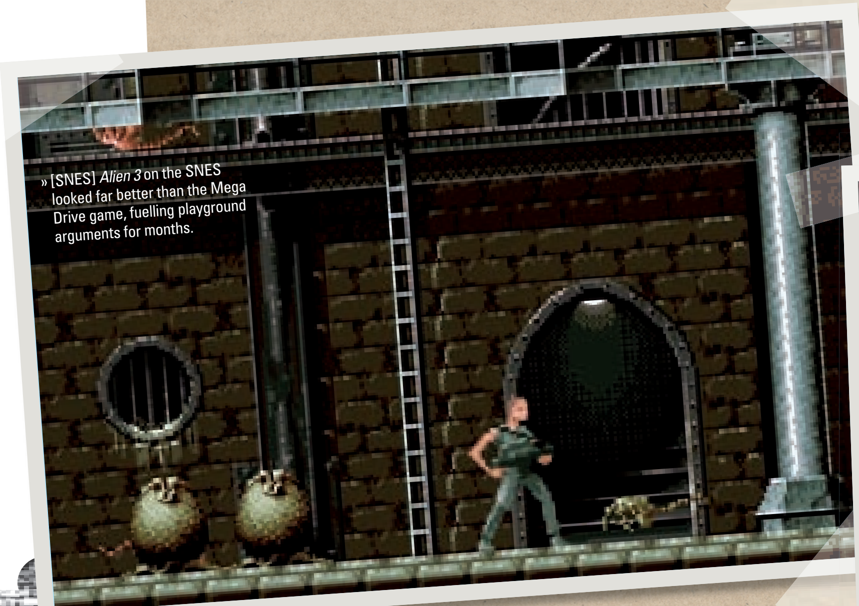
Exhibit 1: Mega Drive

■ Probe Software produced all of the *Alien 3* game versions bar the Game Boy edition, and while the Mega Drive release doesn't hold a candle – in a visual respect, at least – to the company's different-in-almost-every-respect SNES game, there is an argument for it being the better game. The Mega Drive version is an arcade run-and-gunner, pure and simple. It's not particularly flashy, nor does it attempt to do something particularly groundbreaking. Look past the celebrity and carnage, and the game is basically just a survival-horror take on *Elevator Action* – just substitute retrieving sensitive files in an office block teeming with enemy agents with freeing murderers from inside a prison filled with hostile aliens.

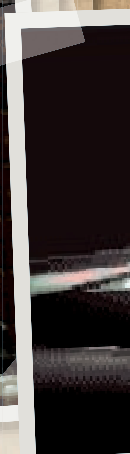
Visually the game looks good, with the Mega Drive's trademark gloomy visuals lending a nice extra layer of menace to it. And while it doesn't have as many Alien species as the Super Nintendo version, using them sparingly in the game and giving you a stringent time limit in which to rescue the prisoners does add a real sense of tension to proceedings as it forces the player to continually push on and complete their mission regardless of their ammo and health situation. That said, our biggest gripe with the game is that it can feel a little repetitive, and by remembering the layout of the stages and whereabouts of the prisoners – the game even reveals their locations when you die – the mission can be finished with relative ease. While the Mega Drive version may not have the same level of polish as its SNES counterpart, it remains one of the best movie-licensed games to find release on the Mega Drive. *Demolition Man*, *Stargate*, *Warlock*, *Cliffhanger*… Must we continue?

Exhibit 2: Super Nintendo

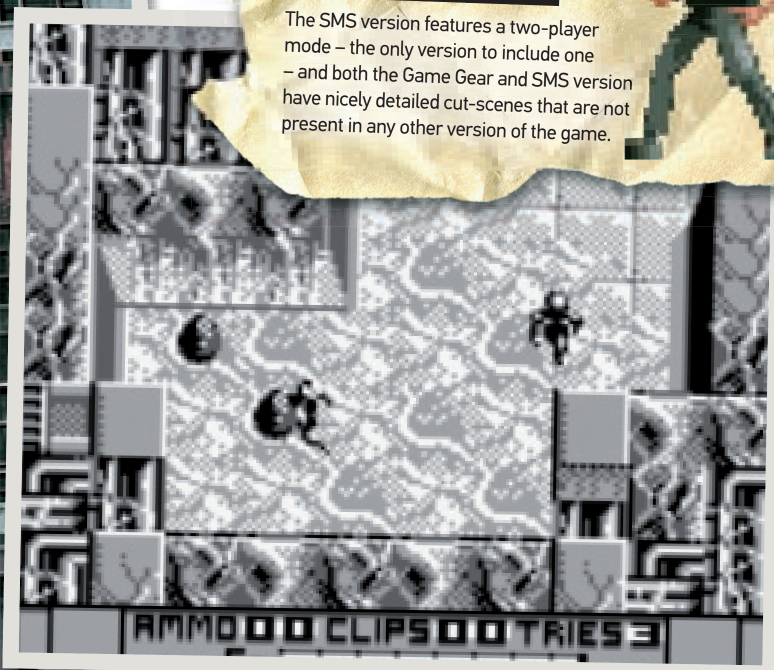
■ The SNES edition of *Alien 3* is regarded by many as the best version of the game. Controversially, we don't actually share this opinion. For all its wonderful presentation, with atmospheric visuals and sound, the game has blatant gameplay issues that mar the experience somewhat. Firstly, the controls feel a little unwieldy, and ducking and firing your weapons at eggs and Facehuggers on the ground is a frustrating endeavour owing to some iffy collision detection. Ultimately, though, the game just fails to build any kind of tension because it throws far too many respawning aliens at you, desensitising your nervous system until shooting them feels like stepping on cockroaches. Where this version really shines, however, is that it is far less linear than the MD game, with Ripley tasked with a variety of missions that she can complete in any order, and while this does lead to some backtracking at points, you'll likely look past it because the game is just so wonderfully detailed and presented that it's a real joy to explore. Conserving ammo and using computer terminals to learn the layout of the facility is imperative to finishing the game, which means it's perhaps not as instantly accessible as the Mega Drive game. You'll certainly get no argument from us that the game doesn't look superb, that its soundtrack isn't up there with some of the best SNES efforts, and that it offers plenty more for your money than the Sega game, but we don't agree that this iteration is country miles better than any other version. Between the SNES and Mega Drive versions, it's about even in our opinion.



» [SNES] *Alien 3* on the SNES looked far better than the Mega Drive game, fuelling playground arguments for months.









TRIVIA

The SMS version features a two-player mode – the only version to include one – and both the Game Gear and SMS version have nicely detailed cut-scenes that are not present in any other version of the game.

» [Game Boy] The Game Boy version wins points for sticking more closely to the plot of the film.

Exhibit 3: Game Boy



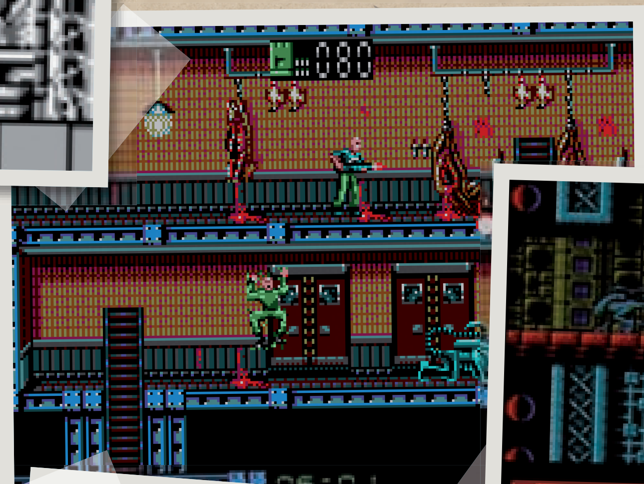
■ Developed by Bits Studios, the British company behind this under-played Game Boy gem really doesn't have the most staggering track record when it comes to movie licences: *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* and *Last Action Hero* are just two of the studio's licensed turkeys that have found release over the years. However, this portable adaptation of *Alien 3* is actually a surprisingly good effort, and one that fans of the movie should certainly try to track down and experience. The reason for our surprising adulation is mainly because it plays brilliantly well to the strengths of the host console. After scrapping Probe's side-on all-out action approach – the Game Boy was home to about a zillion of those titles anyway – the studio opted to roll with a top-down *Alien Breed*-style shooter instead, but with a stronger emphasis on exploration. It's also probably the most faithful, in terms of story, of all the games on this list, as it finds Ripley in the midst of prisoners, whom she can occasionally converse with, and completely unarmed when things start to go down the crapper, getting it bonus points for accuracy. The game does pose quite a challenge, though, mainly as it can sometimes be confusing to know where you're supposed to be going next. The fact that there is no password system or battery to save your progress is a bit of an oversight, however, as it means you have to finish the thing in a single sitting, but these small gripes aside, this version is an enjoyable, atmospheric and compelling action-adventure game for Nintendo's monochromatic gazillion-seller.

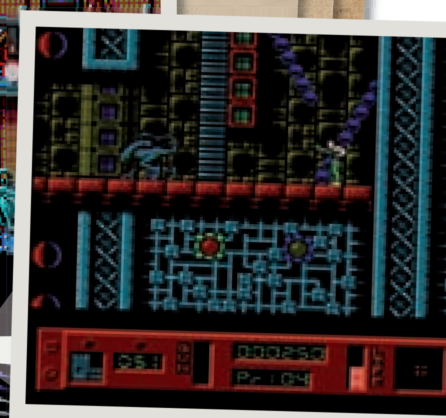


» [SNES] Even in game form, the story has the ability to annoy *Aliens* fans.

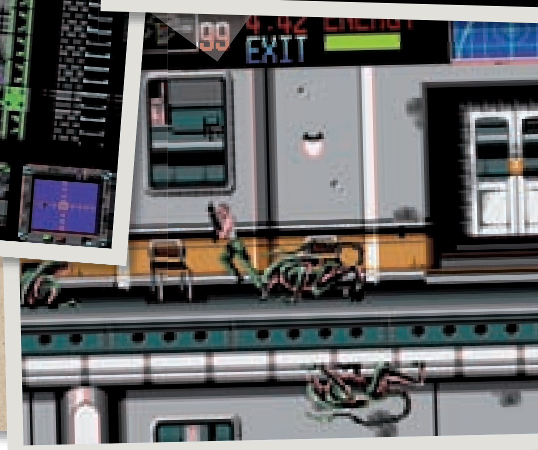
Exhibit 4: And the rest

■ The NES, Commodore 64, Master System and Game Gear versions, also by Probe Software, are essentially just pared-down ports of the Mega Drive game, and find Ripley continuing to explore various dingy and poorly lit levels, trying to rescue the trapped prisoners dotted around in annoyingly hard-to-reach places. As the level arrangements and prisoner positions do differ ever so slightly between the NES, C64 and 8-bit Sega ports, we thought we'd flag them up here. The Amiga version, however, is nigh-on identical to the Mega Drive iteration, but it just doesn't look quite as good.









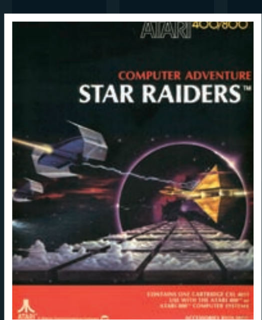
» As fans of the Mega Drive version we appreciate all these ports of varying quality. Converting the lesser visuals to even less capable hardware doesn't always give the nicest results, though.

The Verdict:

As it's a tie between the SNES and MD games, we're actually going to award the prize to the impressive C64 effort – for turning out a game that's just as good but on the limited hardware. It might be hard to come by as it was a very late release for the computer, but there's no doubt that it's a superb effort that ticks every box: great visuals, gameplay, music and atmosphere.

STAR RAIDERS

The world's first free-roaming starship simulator, Star Raiders was the killer application that boosted sales of Atari's early home computers like no other. Mike Bevan talks to programmer Doug Neubauer about the creation of a truly groundbreaking 3D space shoot-'em-up



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** ATARI
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **PLATFORM:** ATARI 8-BIT, 2600, 5200, ST
- » **RELEASED:** 1979
- » **GENRE:** 3D SPACE SHOOTER
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5+

The star-date is 1979. *Space Invaders* is just a year old, *Pong* is barely out of nappies, and *Pac-Man* is yet to unleash on the world its yellow, pizza-faced protagonist. Atari, buoyant on the success of its 2600 console, is gearing up for the release of its first generation of home computers. Gamers bemoan the comparatively high price of the new machines and return to the straightforward but enjoyable thrills of the VCS games catalogue. Then, seemingly out of nowhere, comes *Star Raiders*.

While space-themed shooters of the era – the likes of *Galaxian* and *Space Invaders* – put you in simple single-screen firefights, *Star Raiders* gave you the commander's seat of a starship for a full-on, genuinely cinematic 'mission', defending a clutch of friendly star bases from the invading forces of the Zylon Empire. Compared to the static shooting galleries of many popular videogames, *Star Raiders* was a revelation, portraying a 3D star field through which players could plot their ship's course with the help of a simple but versatile 'Galactic Chart', engage the Zylon battle fleet, and strategise in real-time.

It wasn't hard to see why *Star Raiders* soon started flying off the shelves, along with Atari's first two home computers, the 400 and 800. Given the public interest in space-themed sci-fi in the wake of the first instalment of the *Star Wars* saga, gamers and closet Luke Skywalkers alike went gaga for the immersive intergalactic action that the game offered. Many customers reportedly bought Atari computers just to play *Star Raiders*.

Surprisingly for such an innovative, compelling title, its creator, Doug Neubauer, had never written a published game before. With a background in electrical engineering rather than game design, Neubauer was one of the many early classic game programmers to fall into the industry on a whim. "I remember having the choice between working at National Semiconductor in their calculator and home computer/videogame department, working at IBM in their electric typewriter division, or working in San Diego at some aerospace company," Neubauer reminisces. "Videogames and home computers looked a lot more interesting, not to mention fun. In hindsight, I think I made the right choice."

"I was hired at National by Richard Simone, who went on to head Atari's 'dedicated game' console department," he continues, "which paralleled Jay Miner's 'cartridge-based' game console department." It was a move that Neubauer soon made himself. At Atari, he would be one of the key figures in the development of the POKEY sound chip, which graced the company's 400/800 computers, along with a number of migrant employees from National. "The chip design department at Atari was more like a traditional semiconductor company, with senior design architects coming up with the overall design specification, and then folks like



» [Atari 8-bit] The Galactic Chart tracks your position along with friendly star bases and Zylon fighter groups, allowing you to warp quickly to the action.







» [Atari 8-bit] The hyperwarp sequence. On higher levels players must keep the crosshair central to avoid jumping past their destination by several light years.

me, the logic and circuit designers, implementing the spec," he recalls.

The transition from circuit to software design, as Neubauer began to start work on the programming project that would become *Star Raiders*, was prompted by a period of downtime during his hardware design duties. "POKEY was finished and we were waiting on the other two chips to be completed," he remembers. "My work was pretty much finished, except for helping the test engineers get the POKEY test fixture up and running. Atari was pretty laid back, and I was working for the legendary Jay Miner, who let me work on the game. Also, I think *Star Raiders*, along with the other early games, helped in finding any bugs in the Atari 400/800 chips."

Inspired by the text-based *Star Trek* game doing the rounds on mainframe computers at the time, Neubauer set about creating something that he really wanted to play himself: an ambitious simulation of 3D space combat. "*Battlestar Galactica* was 'the' sci-fi TV show," he says, confirming the influence behind the game's Zylon enemies. "Other influences were *Star Trek*, *Star Wars*, *THX 1138*, *War Of The Worlds* and *2001*. Also, any number of science-fiction stories by Isaac Asimov, and *Dune* by Frank Herbert.

"I should confess that I never actually played the old *Star Trek* game. I just listened to other programmers describing the game and looked over their shoulders a few times. The game just didn't look that interesting to play, but it looked like a good idea for a galactic chart."

> **"Neubauer created something that he wanted to play himself: a simulation of 3D space combat"**

The backbone of *Star Raiders*, the Galactic Chart, is the arena for the strategic element that, coupled with the enjoyable, fast-paced 3D combat, so impressed players at the time. As you 'hyperwarp', Kirk-style, between its grid-like sectors, enemy ships go about the business of trying to surround your star bases like a game of real-time interstellar chess.

"Not having played the game, I didn't have any improvements in mind, but I had a rough idea of how the Galactic Chart should operate," says Neubauer, "with star bases where you refuelled and repaired damage. Also you had to defend the star bases from enemy fleets. I 'borrowed' a number of ideas from *Star Trek* and *Star Wars*, such as the 3D cockpit view, the attack computer, and the hyperwarp graphic."

The hyperwarp sequence, with its movie-like transition of rushing stars as you hurtle to your next destination, turned out to be one of

SOLARIS

ALTHOUGH *STAR RAIDERS II* may be the official sequel, many fans of the original will point to Neubauer's own *Solaris* as the true successor to the original game. *Solaris* may alter the perspective from a first to a third-person view similar to Konami's *Gyruss*, but it retains the frantic 3D sprite-based dogfighting of Neubauer's debut, and is a massive technical accomplishment for the lowly 2600. Published in 1986, late in the life of Atari's ageing console, many consider the game to be the ultimate graphical tour de force for the system.

"I didn't consider *Solaris* as a sequel to *Star Raiders*, although I guess it kind of is," comments Neubauer. "They both fly through space, they both have Galactic Charts, and *Solaris* extends the game with flying on the planet surface and through a trench.

"For a time, the game that eventually became *Solaris* was going to be used as the game for *The Last Starfighter*, but this plan got tossed when Jack Tramiel bought the company. I think *Star Raiders* had better gameplay, though, and I much preferred *Star Raiders*' explosion graphics. Also, I think I prefer the pure cockpit view of *Star Raiders*."



CONVERSIONS AND COPYCATS

STAR RAIDERS (ATARI VCS) 1982
■ Generally regarded as a rather weak port of the Atari 400/800 original, this version shrinks the Galactic Chart from a 36-by-16 grid to a mere 4-by-4, giving players a much more limited *Raiders* experience. It was also expensive by VCS standards, as it came packaged with an exclusive touch-screen pad controller.



STARMASTER (ATARI VCS) 1982
■ Atari's biggest gaming industry rival, Activision, considerably bettered the official VCS port with its own take on the format. Programmed by ex-Atari game designer Alan Miller, *Starmaster* featured more impressive and detailed graphics, a larger Galactic Chart, and enjoyably frenetic deep-space action.



PHASER PATROL (ATARI VCS) 1982
■ Designed by Dennis Caswell, more famous as the creator of a certain *Impossible Mission*, this was possibly the finest *Raiders* clone on the VCS. The downside was that the game was only compatible with the Starpath Supercharger, a device that increased system memory, bundled in for a whopping $44.95.



SENTINEL (COMMODORE 64) 1984
■ Owners of Commodore's beige bread bin who were understandably envious of Atari-owning school friends could do a lot worse than pick up Synapse Software's slick, visually attractive take on *Star Raiders*, as *Zzap!64* magazine keenly noted when it was re-released in the UK on the budget Americana label.



CODENAME MAT (ZX SPECTRUM) 1984
■ Micromega's ambitious *Raiders*-esque shooter – it stands for 'Mission: Alien Termination' if you were wondering – is one of the best games of its type on the Speccy. Here, the familiar grid-style star chart is supplemented by an ingenious global 3D long-range scanner, showing the positions of enemies in your vicinity.



STAR RAIDERS II (VARIOUS) 1986
■ Developed without Doug Neubauer, who had long left Atari as a full-time employee, this is *Raiders* in name only, starting life as a home computer version of the later abandoned *Last Starfighter* movie licence. Its firefights above pseudo-3D planets are pretty, but the depth and classic appeal of the original is largely absent.



STAR RAIDERS (ATARI ST) 1988
■ The only 16-bit version of *Raiders* is disappointing to say the least. The 'improved' graphics aren't actually very good, the controls feel 'floaty' and odd, the aft view and tracking computers are next to useless, and, worst of all, it's far slower than the original. Also, criminally there's no mention of Neubauer in the in-game credits.



BATTLESPHERE (ATARI JAGUAR) 2000
■ Clearly developed by *Star Raiders* fans, and one of the last full-blown Jaguar games, *Battlesphere*'s single-player campaign plays like a next-gen *Raiders*, as you battle a variety of beautifully texture-mapped enemy craft and direct your fleet against enemy star bases and multiple factions in real-time.



"Nobody knew the algorithms for 3D motion, so I sat down with a piece of paper and worked it out"

the signature moments of the game. On lower levels players can simply relax and enjoy the view, but higher difficulty modes require manual intervention en route.

"Initially I was going to make the hyperwarp more complicated, where the player was going to have to do some kind of calculations in order to make the jump, like Isaac Asimov's *The Stars, Like Dust*, but it didn't take too long to realise that it was a dumb idea in terms of gameplay for an action videogame," he chuckles.

Given the graphic limitations of the first-generation Atari computers, Neubauer remembers struggling with the routine for the 3D combat initiated by warping into an enemy sector. "As far as I know, it was the first 3D space game," he says. "I asked around Atari if anyone knew the algorithms for 3D motion, but nobody did. At the time there weren't really any other space videogames out there – that I was aware of, anyway. So I wasted a few weeks trying to figure out the equations, until I finally sat down with a piece of paper and worked out the geometry. The hard part was figuring out the rotation algorithm without using sines and cosines."

Regardless of his lack of familiarity with the capabilities of the hardware, Neubauer's efforts paid off, with some surprisingly visceral ship-to-ship fights as players fling photon torpedoes across the starscape while dodging incoming fire with judicious use of thrusters and shields. Neubauer states candidly that he might have been able to come up with something even better with a bit more experience of the Atari's graphics chip: "The Atari 800 had something like four sprites, that I really didn't know how to use very well at that time, so I think there are only two bad guys on the screen at a time along with your two photon torpedoes and one enemy torpedo. I could have got more bad guys on the screen by reusing the sprites like I did with *Solaris* on the 2600."

Along with the realistic star field, another highlight was the use of spectacular particle explosions, similar to those seen in *Defender*. "Once I had the algorithm down for the 3D motion, the star field was pretty simple," comments Neubauer. "Ditto the explosions, except that trying to calculate the positions of that many particles using my crummy 16-bit multiplier code slowed down the game. One interesting detail was getting the star field to work in the aft view. It's more complicated than the forward view."

Worth pointing out is Neubauer's innovative 'targeting computer', which automatically tracks enemies from forward to aft as they circle you; surely the first example of an auto-tracking camera seen in a videogame.



» [Atari 8-bit] The long-range scanner tracks the position of any enemy ships in the vicinity, allowing you to adjust your course and intercept.



PUBLISHER HIGHLIGHTS

PONG (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: ARCADE, ATARI 2600, ATARI 5200
YEAR: 1972

MISSILE COMMAND
SYSTEM: ARCADE, ATARI 2600, ATARI 5200, LYNX, GAME BOY, XBOX LIVE ARCADE
YEAR: 1980

BREAKOUT
SYSTEM: ARCADE, ATARI 2600, ATARI 5200
YEAR: 1976



» [Atari 8-bit] *Star Raiders* was ahead of its time in simulating damage to separate ship systems. Here we've lost our targeting computer in an asteroid hit and we'll have to locate enemies manually until it gets repaired.





» [Atari 8-bit] The particle explosions in *Star Raiders* were impressive for their time, even if they do slow the game down. Note the attack computer bottom-right – one of the first instances of a 'radar' scanner in a 3D game.



» [Atari 8-bit] Activating shields will protect you from instant death by enemy torpedo, but your ship's systems can still be damaged and you'll deplete precious energy. Head to the nearest friendly star base to repair and refuel.

The game's AI was equally impressive, even if Neubauer admits that he had to "dumb down the Zylon brain to something on the order of a turnip" in order not to overwhelm players.

"As I remember, the bad guys would randomly pick a star base to attack, and then each enemy fleet would choose the shortest path to the star base," he explains. "This algorithm didn't quite work, as from time to time the bad guys would get stuck. I added a little randomness to their path so they could get unstuck. On the higher levels, they move a little faster and they get smarter, in that there's less 'randomness' in their attack algorithm."

Star Raiders is particularly impressive for the fact that Neubauer wrote it to be capable of running on the low-end Atari 400, in a measly 8K of memory. "We ended up with a lot of ugly spaghetti code to make everything fit on the cartridge," he reveals. "For example, if the graphic of an enemy ship ended in a 0 byte, and the starting byte of the next graphic was also a 0 byte, then the programmer could overlap the two bytes of the two graphics, with the net result of saving a byte. In this day and age that sounds kind of pathetic, when even a small JPEG image is greater than 8K."

One game feature that Neubauer had to abandon due to memory restrictions would famously become a key feature of the classic space-trading game *Elite* when it debuted five years later on the BBC Micro. "I wanted to be able to fly into the star base for docking," he says, "but I didn't have enough bytes in the ROM to do that. Although, for some reason, when I did *Star Raiders*, I wasn't thinking about flying through a trench or flying onto the surface of a planet."

Although David Braben has stated that he wasn't aware of *Star Raiders* when he started working on *Elite*, a feature they do both share is a quirkily humorous ranking system. While *Elite* grades players from 'Harmless' to 'Elite', *Star Raiders* rookies will soon become familiar with the phrases 'Galactic Cook' and 'Garbage Scow Captain', while veteran space aces can aspire to the ultimate accolade of 'Star Commander (Class 1)'.

"I didn't want to just have a number score, so having rankings like in the military seemed natural," explains Neubauer. "And, of course, I threw in a few gag ratings when you didn't do so good…"

The game's release on cartridge format was wildly successful for Atari. Players loved the fact that they could plug in their copy and be scouring the galaxy for space vermin in mere seconds. Computer magazine reviewers, particularly in the US, were ecstatic. Conversions for the Atari VCS and later the 16-bit ST computer followed, along with a sequel, *Star Raiders II*, with which Neubauer actually had no involvement. But like many others in the industry at the time, Neubauer's rewards for his pioneering original creation were minimal.

"At that time, Atari wasn't doing royalties," he says. "Only later in '83 or so did they start paying programmers royalties, mainly to keep any more from leaving and starting up their own companies. I had left Atari to work at Hewlett-Packard, so I missed out on a lot of the press. When I came back in 1981, it was kind of amazing, but if there was any kind of ego thing involved, the crash of '83 cured it."

However, perhaps the most deserved tribute came in 2007, when *Star Raiders* was selected by a panel instigated by Stanford University as one of the ten most important videogames of all time, joining such notable entrants as *Zork*, *Tetris*, *Civilization* and *Doom*. Asked what he makes of this, Neubauer's reply is typically humble and concise: "It's pretty amazing, actually," he says.



Centipede

Stuart Campbell's been trying all afternoon to come up with a cat-based joke with the punchline "The scent 'e peed". HE HAS FAILED...

Atari's 1980 hit *Centipede* is perhaps best known in the annals of gaming history for being the first successful videogame designed by a woman. Despite the handicap of not being able to spell 'Donna', famously female lady Dona Bailey created, alongside Atari veteran Ed Logg, one of the most iconic games of the arcade golden generation, an assertion supported by the game's continuing life in basically unchanged form 30 years later.

It's frequently also claimed that *Centipede* was one of the first games to attract large numbers of female players into arcades, though the evidence substantiating this claim seems to be entirely anecdotal. (In *The Ultimate History Of Video Games*, Steven Kent suggests that part of the reason for this supposed phenomenon may have been Bailey's unusual choice of colour palette, utilising a lot more 'girly' pastel shades than was common at the time.)

The average gamer, though, has no idea just how many *Centipede* games there have been. Apart from the arcade sequel *Millipede* and the relatively well-known Hasbro reboot from 1998 – a point in time where everyone and his dog's mum was updating early arcade classics, with extremely variable quality – a random scientific survey that we conducted in the street recently showed that (a) most people can name a maximum of three different *Centipede* games, and (b) it's really hard to get people to stop talking about *The Human Centipede* once they've started. Eww...

Anyway, as it happens there have been loads of different *Centipede* games, awareness of which is not helped by the fact that most of them are just called '*Centipede*'. Not helped, that is, until the appearance of this edition of The Definitive. So let's put history to rights right now, by climbing up those fact mountains, absorbing some of those info trees and defeating that evil knowledge monster once and for all! [You're thinking of *The Sentinel* – Ed]

CENTIPEDE 1980 (arcade)

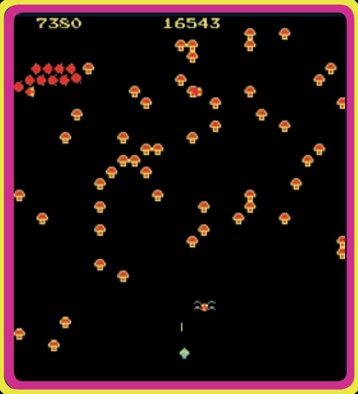
Atari has never seemed quite able to decide what sort of atmosphere it wanted to create with *Centipede*. The arcade cabinet artwork depicts the centipede as a terrifying, reptilian-looking monster with evil red eyes, scary fangs, a snake-like forked tongue and crab's pincers instead of legs – which is a pretty confused genealogical mishmash in the first place – but according to subsequent versions you're actually supposed to be playing as a sweet little elf-like garden gnome with a magic wand, battling a garden full of cute bugs that look like a load of spacehoppers with big feet doing a conga.

There's certainly nothing twee or gentle about the game in play, though. Once you get past the opening couple of waves, *Centipede* is one of the fiercest games of its era, and one of the most cunning elements is that you're constantly punished for your own success. Shooting the centipede's body parts leaves behind mushrooms, which speed the progress down the screen of subsequent centipedes, and often splits your dastardly opponent into two equally deadly enemies instead of one.

A few levels in and you'll find yourself being subjected to a relentless barrage of spiders bouncing around in your play area, scorpions poisoning mushrooms and turning the centipedes into crazed dive-bombers, and fleas constantly dropping yet more mushrooms to obstruct your movement around the screen. Shoot them away and the game just cackles maliciously and sends in more and more fleas.

Coupled with the demands of the trackball controller, the merciless onslaught made *Centipede* probably the most demanding game ever seen in the arcades until the arrival of *Defender*, a game that it resembles in more ways than one. (We think it's three.)

The simplicity of the design made the game a relatively easy port, and most home formats got an Atarisoft conversion. Even the Atari VCS had a full-featured implementation, albeit with most of the graphics replaced by blocks.

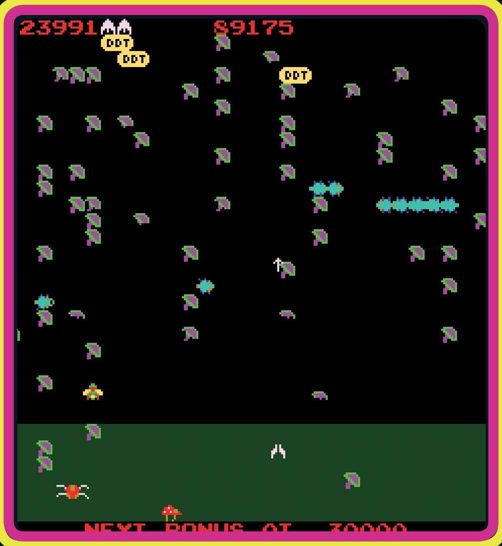


» [Arcade] The coin-op's manual describes your player as being a vaguely humanoid head shape. You decide.



» A rare shot of a real-life *Arcade Classics* cabinet.





» [Arcade] The arcade sequel somehow looks harder and colder than Bailey's original. As you can plainly see.

MILLIPEDE 1982 (arcade)

Dona Bailey seems to have pretty much vanished from the world of videogames after *Centipede* – perhaps to travel the world on a lonely and never-ending quest to find and be reunited with the other 'n' from her name – and Atari's sequel, originally developed under the name *Centipede Deluxe*, is credited to Ed Logg alone. You can see the difference immediately: this is a much less pretty-looking game and altogether more masculine, with an army of new enemies and the introduction of chemical weapons, in the form of the actually fairly useless DDT bomb.

Despite the addition of numerous new bugs, though, *Millipede* is actually a rather easier game. Creatures like the inchworm slow all on-screen baddies down for a few seconds when shot, and zapping a mosquito scrolls all the mushrooms on the screen up a row, clearing the player some precious manoeuvring space. Occasional all-mosquito special waves provide the chance to empty the playfield of obstacles, compared to *Centipede*'s inescapable process of filling it up until it's almost solid.

To challenge more experienced players for whom this was an unwelcome development, Logg instituted a level-skip function at the start, whereby you could start several waves into the game, in return for a bonus of 15,000 points. If you then progressed through several more increments of 15,000 points, you could start your next game at 30,000, 45,000, 60,000 and so on.

Though it's arguably more enjoyable to play than its parent, there have been surprisingly few ports of *Millipede* to home consoles. The Atari 8-bits and the ST got versions, as did the NES. But the game was usually omitted from Atari's numerous retro compilations, and it was only with the Xbox Live Arcade remake 25 years later that *Millipede* would properly make it into the new millennium.

THE DEFINITIVE...

CENTIPEDE

SUPER CENTIPEDE

1992 (arcade)

Atari ignored the *Centipede* line entirely for a decade, and its next appearance was an abortive one. The 1992 *Arcade Classics* coin-op was never officially released in arcades, but the completed prototype, of which a tiny handful – fewer than ten in the world – were built and delivered to test sites, featured *Super Centipede* and *Missile Command II*, which replaced the generic cities of the first game with named depictions of London, Moscow, Paris and more.

Super Centipede doesn't initially appear to be very Super. Apart from 'enhanced' graphics, the only gameplay difference is that the playfield is wider and the game a little slower as a result. However, if you enter the DIP switch menu you can turn on various extras, which add things like flea and mosquito waves, and randomly dropping power-ups including rapid-fire, invincibility and temporary DDT grenades, which are identified for you by the campest in-game announcer ever, who also counts down to their disappearance in a very creepy voice. We kept expecting Scooby Doo to appear and reveal him as having been the dastardly ghost haunting the old arcade all along, to scare the *Centipede*-loving kids away so he could drill for oil.

But anyway. Happily, despite its commercial non-existence, *Arcade Classics* hasn't been lost to history – it can be played in MAME.



» [Arcade] As is often the case, 'enhanced' graphics don't necessarily mean 'better looking'.



» [Arcade] This is how the game looked in the arcades, complete with 'bezel' surround. Some retro releases replicate this look.

CENTIPEDE

1992 (Sega Master System)

One Atari classics compilation that did make it to market in the same year, though, was *Arcade Smash Hits* for the Sega Master System, which was actually released by Virgin. Alongside *Missile Command* and *Breakout*, the *Centipede* game that appeared on the cart was, in fact, a hybrid of *Centipede* and *Millipede*. Like *Arcade Classics*, it borrowed some *Millipede* elements, such as the mosquito waves – only here they don't cause the screen to scroll – but there are no power-ups, unless you count being able to select either four or seven lives at the start.

Apart from poison mushrooms being a lot less deadly – the centipede only plummets down the screen when poisoned until it encounters a normal mushroom, rather than until you shoot its head – the game is a little harder, partly due to having to control it with a joypad and partly due to the horribly distracting effect of the dreadful chip music that replaces the coin-op's menacing stampede of arthropod footsteps.



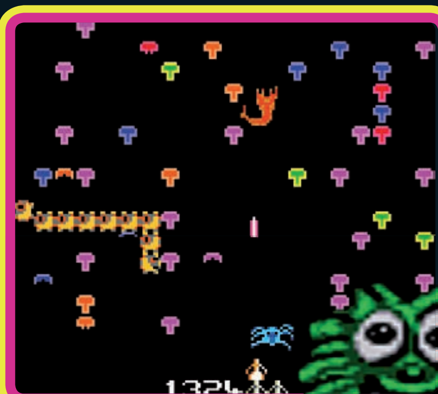
» [SMS] Disappointingly, the colours never change in the SMS version.

CENTIPEDE 1995 (Game Boy/GB Color)

The release of *Centipede* for the Game Boy, and subsequently the Game Boy Color, in 1995 is really only interesting for the inclusion of two-player link-up modes, both competitive and co-op. There's also a pass-the-Game-Boy arcade-style two-player game, which is thoughtful. Weirdly, you also get the *Millipede*-esque ability to start on one of four different levels – 0, 10, 19 or 28 – but without any starting bonus.

The colour version sports a garish candy rainbow of multicoloured mushrooms rather than, say, trying to look like arcade *Centipede*, but it's the mono version that's more notable. That's because it features what must surely be the longest unskippable corporate splash screen sequence before being able to start a handheld game ever. From turning the power on to firing your first shot, the fastest you can possibly get to the mushroom field – even in a ROM-based game with no loading – is a breathtaking 35 seconds. So much for quick-access portable gaming.

You're not missing much, though. Even if you start on Level 28 ('Expert') the game is slow, easy and rubbish.



» [Game Boy Color] This is how *Centipede* looks to Jeff Minter.

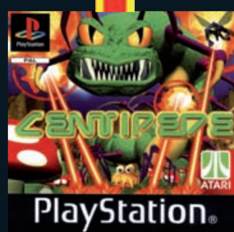
CENTIPEDE 1998 (PS/PC/Dreamcast)

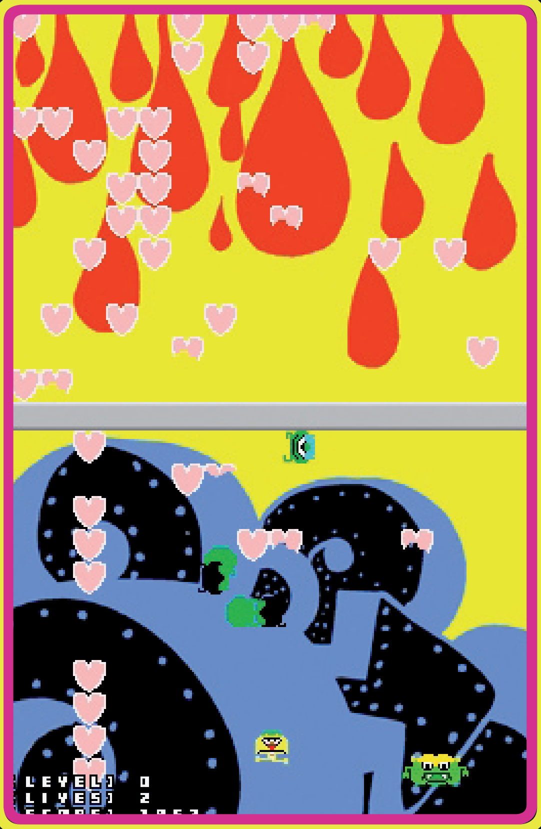
Hasbro's 1998 reboot of *Centipede* is a good illustration of the problems that can arise when you try to convert games designed for a static 2D screen with small graphics into a zoomed-in 3D environment. While the new version retains all the core gameplay ideas of the original, along with welcome new elements like power-ups and defending human villages, having to navigate around in 3D to find where the next wave of centipedes is coming from, or reverse blindly into possible danger, only serves to detract from the fairness and intensity of the coin-op, for the sake of looking better in screenshots for idiot graphics whores.

The result isn't awful by any means – it's just that it's so much worse than the original *Centipede*. You do get the arcade game included on the disc, too, but in a sluggish form with an inexplicably terrible frame rate and poor controls, despite supporting the Dual Shock's analogue sticks.



» [PSone] We're not sure we'd build our village close to such enormous bugs.





» [DS] Amazingly, this is one of the less ugly levels of the 'remix' game.

CENTIPEDE 2005 (DS)

If it was a truly awful take on *Centipede* that you wanted, though, you only had seven more years to wait. *Retro Atari Classics*, the ten-game compilation on which *Centipede* is found, was a brilliant idea: take ten vintage Atari coin-ops and put them on the DS in their original form, accompanied by an ultra-modern 'remix' version of each one created in the style of street art.

Unfortunately, the 'classic' versions were often hampered by unbelievably stupid control systems designed by cretins carried away in their excitement about the DS's touch screen without stopping to think about whether using it improved the gameplay experience or not – we don't think it's excessive to say that someone should be BEATEN TO DEATH for what happened to *Tempest*, for example – and the remix versions often looked absolutely, unbearably hideous.

Centipede gets off fairly lightly in the first category, allowing for D-pad control as well as touch screen – although it insists on using the shoulder buttons to fire – but suffers appalling crimes against taste in the second: the graphics appear to have been drawn by a colour-blind chimpanzee with both hands tied behind its back.

It's the gameplay that takes the real kicking in this iteration, though. This is the most spectacularly wretched mangling of *Centipede* you've ever seen, from the completely wrong spider – which moves exclusively horizontally and vertically, rather than diagonally – to the centipede itself, which travels at the speed of a very old snail caught in a glue trap. As a result, the player has time to systematically wipe out every single mushroom on the top screen, leading to the centipede taking almost 40 seconds to reach the player area – as opposed to about two seconds a few waves into the arcade version. Extra lives seem to be awarded at random, the appearances of the flea are totally arbitrary, and there isn't a single identifiable facet of the game that hasn't been screwed up in at least one way. Bonuses all round!

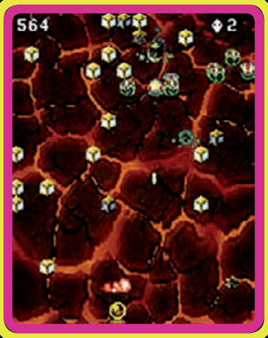
CENTIPEDE 2006 (mobile)

The first handheld version of *Centipede* that wasn't complete crap – the *Atari Anniversary* version on the GBA being accurate in gameplay terms but a stroboscopically flickering mess that induced nausea within minutes – Glu's mobile phone implementation is an extremely thorough and diligent reworking. In addition to the original arcade mode, you get a whole bunch of rather spiffy unlockable graphical themes – Retro, Contempo, Robo, Aqua, Fire and Flower, all of which should be pretty self-explanatory – plus a power-up game.

Power-up mode features a wide range of extremely inventive add-ons including lasers, shields, impact rockets, remote-detonation bombs, your own centipedes that move up the screen, an all-destroying ghost centipede head that you control manually while your shooter is invincible, three-way fire and excellent time-delay grenades.

The downsides are that it's very slow, and the restrictions of mobile phone keypads mean that there's no diagonal movement and rather iffy control response. The biggest one, though, is the power-ups being so good and so powerful that the game is incredibly easy: at normal difficulty we breezed past level 100 on our first try, with eight lives still left, before giving up. In easy mode it's all but physically impossible to run out of lives unless you have a stroke.

It'd be really splendid, though, if someone were to take most of the features of Power-up mode and put them into some sort of 'Evolved' version of the game that could avoid the issues inherent to mobile games by running on a proper games console of some sort, wouldn't it? Could it ever happen?

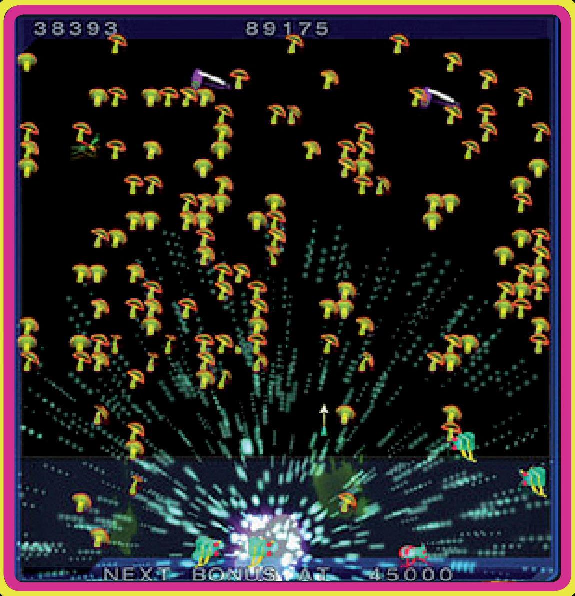




» [Mobile] A veritable toy store of power-ups.



» [Mobile] The yellow things at the bottom are your 'friendly' centipedes, which move up the screen, attacking enemies.



» [XBLA] See? We told you it was splattery.

CENTIPEDE & MILLIPEDE 2007 (XBLA)
CENTIPEDE 2007 (PSP)

And, sure enough, just a year or so later, *Centipede & Millipede* arrived, and did absolutely none of that. Gah. *Centipede & Millipede* is still a great advert for XBLA, though, and for the appearance on current hardware of downloadable classics. Released at just 400 MS Points (£3.40 in old money), you get classic *Centipede*; classic *Millipede*; new versions of each with fancy new vector-style graphics, splattery visual effects and pulsing modern audio; plus insane hyperspeed versions of all four combinations. It's a great package, and the enhanced version of *Millipede* is particularly enjoyable.

The 2007 PSP version of *Centipede*, which appears on *Atari Classics Evolved*, is more or less the same game as the XBLA one, except that – as with most of the compilation – some hateful, brainless dribblewit has decided to make players play the game in portrait mode, forcing them into the ridiculously awkward, skewed, unnatural claw grip brought on by holding the PSP on its end instead of the way it was actually designed to be used.

There's no acceptable reason for this. There's plenty of room on the PSP's screen to play the game in landscape should the player so desire, and readers can rest assured that, should we ever encounter the person responsible for ruining most of the games on *Atari Classics Evolved* in such a moronic way, they'll be getting a steel-toed boot right in the evolutionary equipment.

CENTIPEDE 2009 (iPhone)

And while we're conveniently on the subject of moronic design decisions concerning *Centipede*, it's time to talk about the iPhone game. At first, iPhone *Centipede* – offering the classic original alongside Arcade (new graphics and sound) and Ultra (power-ups) modes – looks like a bit of a triumph. The precision touch screen replicates the trackball controls excellently, and since the iPhone is meant to be held in portrait as well as landscape orientation, there's no problem with having to adopt a freakish, contorted grip.

At least, there isn't in easy mode, where the game fires your laser automatically, leaving you free to concentrate on getting your gnome to where he needs to be. The result is a game that's hugely enjoyable to play but, because easy gives you eight lives, rather too unchallenging.

So you switch to normal (five lives) or hard (three lives), and suddenly everything falls apart. Because rather than increasing the difficulty by making the enemies tougher or faster or more numerous or anything like that, the designers of iPhone *Centipede* have decided to make it harder by essentially making you play it while standing on your head and doing pirouettes.

What you actually have to do is keep your thumb on a fire button at the top corner of the screen because normal and hard do away with auto-fire – but it's no less idiotic. It's not *difficult* to hold your thumb at the top of the screen. What it is is *uncomfortable*, particularly if you don't want the rest of your thumb to obscure a big chunk of one side of the screen. Because these guys are too lazy to program some new enemy algorithms, the player's physical discomfort is now a design feature.

Why not go the whole hog, you hapless, loathsome clowns? Why not have the screen just occasionally blank out for a few seconds mid-game? Why not figure some way to have the iPhone give the player random electric shocks? In fact, why don't you come round to our ["Barstool" – Ed] houses while we're playing and poke us in the ["Contraflow system" – Ed] eye with a ["Monkeyflicking" – Ed] stick?

So we've ended on a bit of a bad note there, readers. Sorry about that. But we're sure that we can all agree that we've learnt a lot about *Centipede*, and about which developers need to be fed slowly to piranhas while sealed inside a diving suit full of angry wasps.



» [iPhone] The iPhone port seems to be currently unavailable.



» [iPhone] In fact, most early Atari games seem to have vanished from sale on most formats.



» [iPhone] This is probably due to licensing issues, or solar flares.



Elevator Action

HIGH-RISE SPY

» RETROREVIVAL



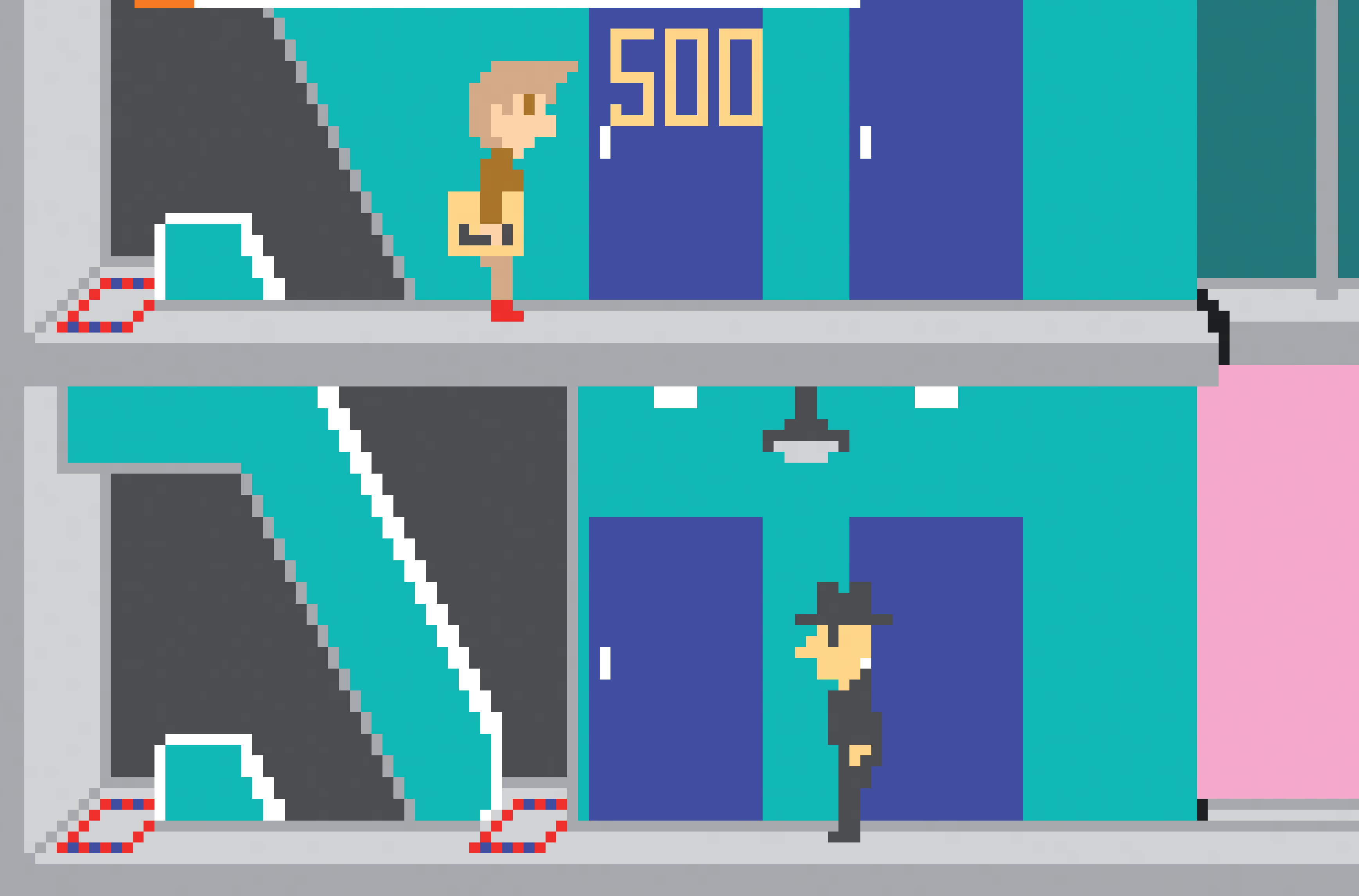
» ARCADE
» TAITO
» 1983

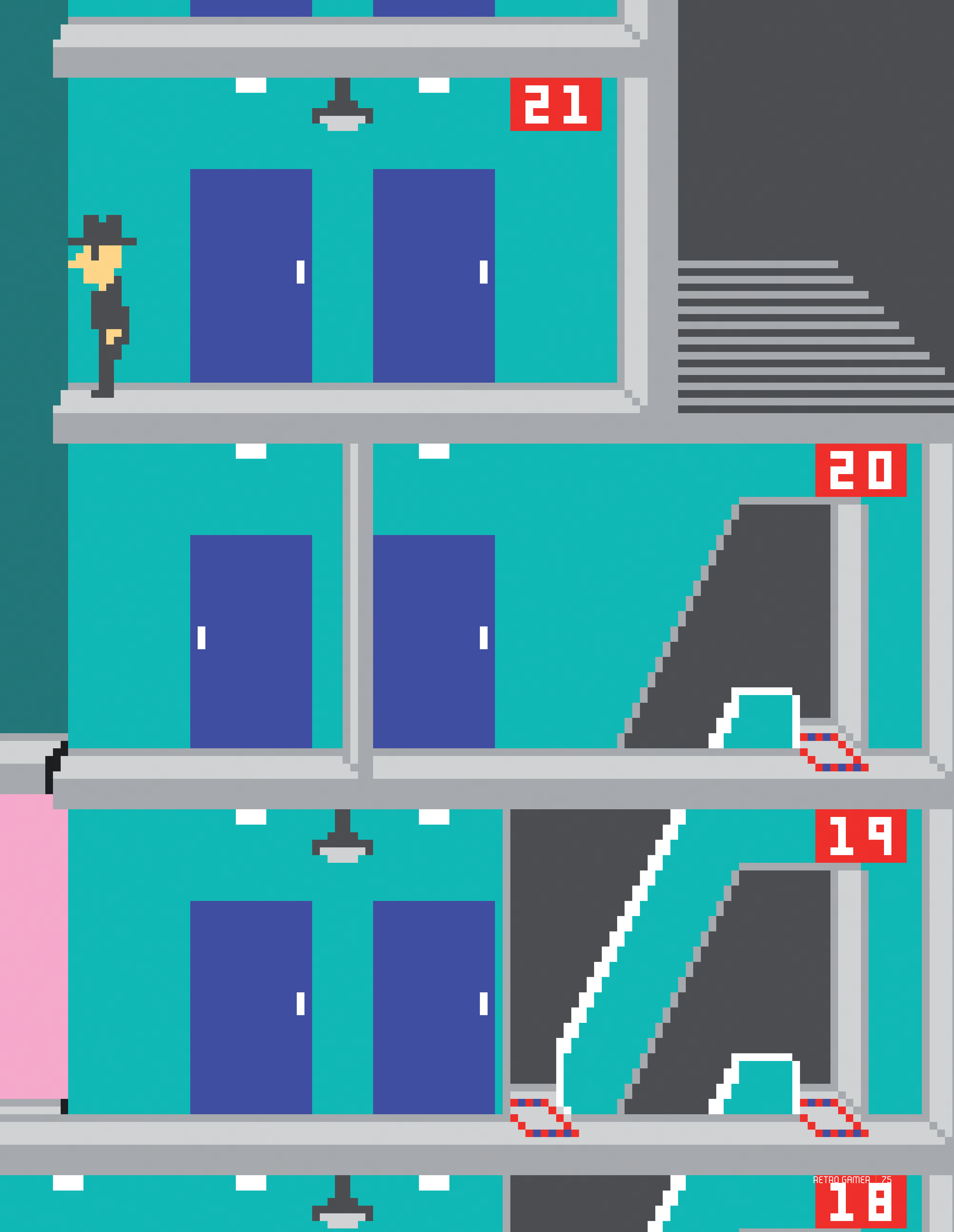
Cinematic, narrative-owning arcade games were practically unheard of before the Eighties. The game to famously change this was *Donkey Kong*, with players steering a cartoony carpenter around four repeating stages of panic to rescue a girl from a miffed gorilla. Owing to *DK*'s global success, though, other developers followed suit, bringing about what many regard as the 'golden age' of videogames. Taito's *Elevator Action* is one such game, capturing the daring and romantic exploits of such literary and television heroes as James Bond, Simon Templar and Napoleon Solo in an addictive run-and-gun action game.

In the game you played Agent 17, a spy bestowed with the odd codename of 'Otto' who is armed with a blond quiff and pistol. Otto's mission was to infiltrate a sequence of 30-storey buildings to retrieve five sensitive files, the details of which are never revealed. At the start of each level, Otto enters through the rooftop, via zip wire, and must negotiate his way downwards, through a maze of escalators and lifts, until all the intel – which is found behind red doors – is collected up. Only then can he make his escape in the getaway car conveniently parked in the basement.

Obviously, Taito didn't want to make this any kind of cakewalk, so chucked in an infinite amount of armed enemy agents to stop Otto. Appearing randomly from blue doors, these agents will chase Otto until they're either stopped with a timely bullet, kicked unconscious, knocked out by Otto shooting down a light fitting (which also casts the building into pitch blackness) or crushed to death by an elevator.

Despite being very popular on its release, *Elevator Action* hasn't aged all that well. Returning to it to write this piece I quickly realised that its gameplay can feel repetitive and frustrating at times – especially on latter stages where enemy agents fire their guns faster and go prone to avoid your bullets. I do remember spending hours and hours playing it on my CPC, though, and being drawn in by the game's quirky spy theme, visuals and setting. Do I think it's still a classic? In true spy fashion, I'm keeping tight-lipped. *




21
20
19
18

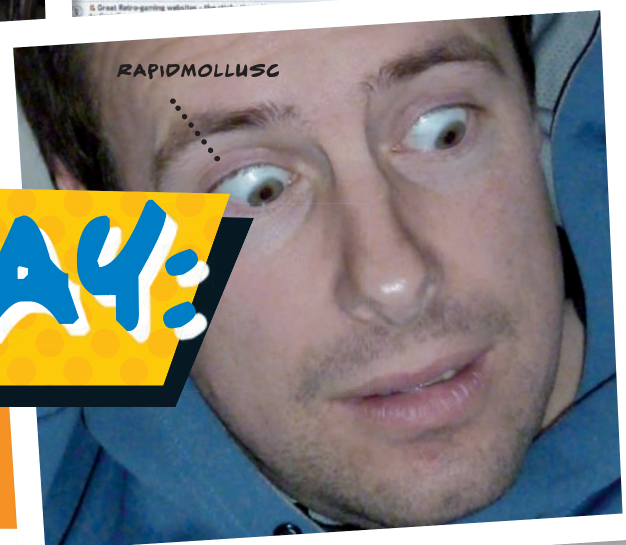
To coincide with our mega guide to Rainbow Islands this month, we thought we'd open up the floor and let you guys have your say about Taito's colourful platformer. Sunglasses and Factor 30 at the ready, it gets very colourful over the next four pages











LET'S ALL PLAY: RAINBOW ISLANDS



INFO

Publisher: Taito
Developer: In-house
First Released: 1987
Featured System: Arcade

First impressions

Stuart The sequel to *Bubble Bobble* saw significant changes to the gameplay: for one it went from being a one-screen-per-stage platformer to a vibrant vertical-scrolller. I actually discovered *Rainbow Islands* before *Bubble Bobble*, so all of these differences never bothered me. But after playing *Rainbow Islands* so much on my CPC I was left wanting more. You can imagine my confusion when I finally tracked down the first game and saw the brothers transformed into dragons. It was that day I learnt a most valuable life-lesson: never judge a game by its absurd-looking heroes.

STranger81 Being honest, my first impression was, 'This is crap'. Give me good old *Bubble Bobble* any day!

Smurph Mine was 'Why isn't this as good as *Bubble Bobble*?' but then I gave it a chance, and it grew on me… a bit. It's still a poor sequel to *Bubble Bobble*, but taken on its own merits it's a cool wee game.

Timothy Lumsden I was feeling a bit sheepish, as the game seemed like it was for children – then slowly, secretly starting to enjoy the colourful action.

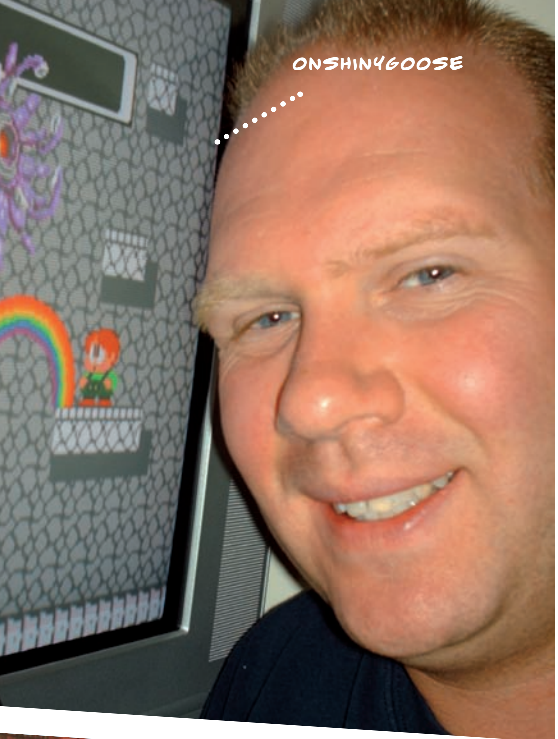
NonShinyGoose I think I jumped on an enemy and died. Then, once I worked out that I had to trap the enemies under rainbows and then leap on the rainbow to kill them, I was hooked. The music did quickly get annoying, though.

ShadowMan My first impression? 'This is a fun game'. Then I actually bothered getting the emeralds in each level and it became even more fun, sometimes frustrating and always challenging as I tried to get the last of the emeralds I was short on a level. To this day, though, I think that damn Vampire boss at the end of the third level is a complete bastard.

Dam Gave this a quick go, having never played it before, and while it's not bad, it quickly went from being very easy to very frustrating. I don't think it deserves 'classic' status, for me it lacks that 'one more go' factor. Fair play to Taito, though, for doing something so different.

Sepp Salerno I've always loved *Rainbow Islands*. It's in my top 20 games of all time. It was one of those games growing up that I had to stick my neck out for in the playground. I mean its overtly cute offering really polarised players. Way back in the early Nineties when I read about how great it was in various Amiga magazines, I have to say I thought they were having a laugh. The artwork that promoted the game and the screenshots I saw made it look a real pansy of a title, but as soon as I played it I was hooked.

Dizrythmia I saw on the title screen that it said it was the story of *Bubble Bobble 2*. Then I started the game and was about to get annoyed that the gameplay was nothing like *Bubble Bobble*, but before the annoyance kicked in I reluctantly found myself enjoying it.





GO DEEPER: TRIVIA TRAIL

>> *Chack'N Pop* is considered a spiritual predecessor. It plays like a mix of *Bubble Bobble* and the 'Rivet' stage in *Donkey Kong*.

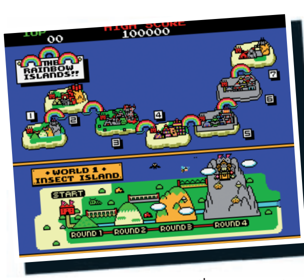
>> Bub and Bob's full human names are Bubby and Bobby, while their dragon ones are Bubblun and Bobblun.

>> *Rainbow Islands* was the first game to get to the top of Amiga Power's Top 100 list. It would be knocked off by *Sensible Soccer*.

>> Two movies called *Rainbow Island* exist. Neither is connected to the game, but they share a premise: people getting chased by natives on an island.

Favourite stage

Darran Whenever I think of *Rainbow Islands* it's always the first world that captures my memory. I wouldn't say that it's the best by a long shot, but it does introduce you beautifully to all the new gameplay mechanics and basically sums up the game and what you're supposed to do immediately. I'm also rather partial to the cute giant spider that awaits you at its end.



JetSetWilly Toy World is good, but I like Monster Island better! Mini vampire bats and a bloody big Dracula to fight at the very end, plus the graphics are rather smart on this island.

mrspud I agree, Monster Island is my favourite. It's also where the difficulty is ramped up and the real challenge to get the gems in the correct order begins.

Tepid Snake The hidden Darius Island, because it honestly looks like you've stepped into the wrong game by mistake. Which, of course, you have.

Sepp Salerno Got to go for the whole kitsch gothic level; bats, bloodsuckers and Bavarian brickwork. Anton Lavey would've been proud.

Sir Arthur Hard one, this. I love the colour and feel of the first island; however I do like the goth stage too. Arghh… both. I like both of them.

khisanth I like the first level for its sheer vibrancy, but Toy World does it for me most.

Favourite boss

Stuart Well, to be honest, my only problem with *Rainbow Islands* is that either its bosses are complete pushovers or they're infuriatingly cheap – the bat-spewing kid Dracula and clown-spewing Clown being two of the worst culprits (I hate those sods). Thus I'm really struggling here to settle on a favourite boss. At a push I guess I'd go for the game's true final boss, Dark Shadow (not that I've ever been able to reach him). He's basically just a giant bubble dragon and the fight is spread across two parts: when you defeat his first form his skin and armour fall away to reveal a freakish skeleton that continues the fight. I guess I just like the fact Taito made an effort to include a bubble dragon somewhere in the game. Good luck trying to reach it, though.



TwoHeadedBoy That big goofy vampire who throws bats all over the place – I can't beat him, but he's so funny I don't mind in the slightest.

Rapidmollusc Really only ever got to see the first three on a regular basis. I saw the Clown a few times but never got as far as Doh. Quite liked the Chopper; wasn't much of a challenge, mind.

Dizrythmia I'm a sucker for a good cameo, so it has to be Doh from *Arkanoid*. It was a challenge to get to him and it was a challenge to beat him. I can't remember what happens after he's defeated. Maybe I never did beat him… childhood memories get lost over the years, I'm afraid.

Why is it a classic?

Stuart Firstly, it's a game that can be played two ways: you can simply peg through the islands simply trying to reach the summit of each stage as quickly as possible, or collect the gems, which are awarded for defeating enemies by dropping rainbows on them in the correct order. Second, the game is rife with secrets – collecting the gems opens up all sorts of benefits: they can open up handy doors that allow you to skirt boss fights and also open up three new islands at the end of the game. Finally, the game looks great, boasts a novel play mechanic which feels brilliantly suited to the platform genre, and has plenty of humour and cool little nods to other Taito franchises too. Doh from *Arkanoid* crops up as a boss at the end of the fifth stage, and the final three secret islands are themed on *Darius*, *Fairyland Story* and *Bubble Bobble*, respectively.



WildWillyWilson Why's it a classic? Easy to pick up and play, that soundtrack, bright colourful graphics and it's just bloody good fun!

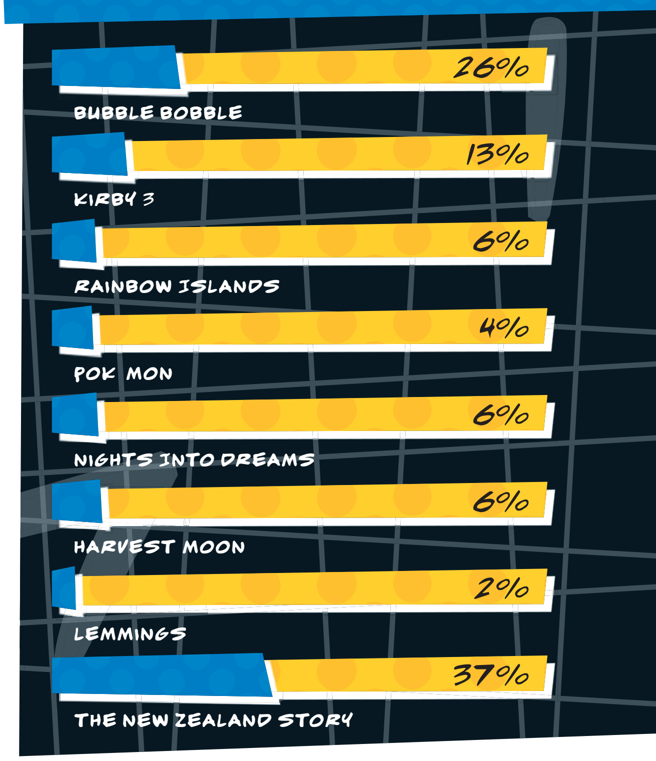
NonShinyGoose It's quite possibly the first ever 'vertical platformer' with a concept easy to grasp – simply get to the top of the screen. The graphics were bright and colourful, which surely made it stand out in the arcade, and rather than shoot enemies or jump on their heads you had to ingeniously trap them underneath rainbows, which was a novel ideal.

Sir Arthur It's a classic because like a lot of Taito games from that time, *Rainbow Islands* is a cracking score attack game.

mrspud It's great on two levels. You can pick it up and just have fun with it as it's so playable, but delve beneath the surface and try to get the gems in the right order and uncover all the secret items takes it to a new level of skill.

FORUM POLL

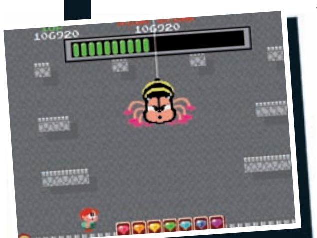
This month: Cutest Game



LET'S ALL PLAY: RAINBOW ISLANDS

Sepp Salerno It's just beautifully put together. Simple to pick up and play, but pretty solid to master, especially when things start speeding up, and get downright unfair. I've stuck up for liking this game when I was a nipper, and I'll stick up for it now. Like *Pac-Man*, *Paper Boy*, *Donkey Kong* and *Columns*, I've never stopped playing it in about 20-odd years, and the game is deserving of the moniker of 'classic'. There's not massive back story to *Rainbow Islands*, or real depth of gameplay, it's just simple, straightforward, arcade magic.

Denny Haynes 'Classic' is a word bandied about far too easily these days, but when you can pick up a game and play from the get-go without a mountain of instructions and keep coming back to it time and again then you know you've hit game gold.



JetSetWilly Accessible gameplay, awesome graphics, the controls are perfect and it's a game even a child could pick up and play. It's easy to learn, but hard to master. Nuff said.

khisanth It's disgustingly cute but oh so fun! The colourful graphics, interesting gameplay mechanic and the fact its Bub and Bob make it great fun to play, the catchy tune sticking in your head and the cool levels make it a classic for me.

Dizrythmia I've always felt it was well deserving of classic status simply because Taito took the series in a new direction and it worked very well. The sequel, *Parasol Stars*, is a good game, but as it goes back to the original formula, I guess it feels a little too safe.

CLASSIC GAME? YOU MUST BE JOKING

Just because a game's praised, it doesn't mean that everyone is going to like it…

"IT'S VERY, VERY TWEE… AND FAR TOO CUTESY FOR ITS OWN GOOD"

IPMARKS

WHAT'S THERE TO LIKE ABOUT RAINBOW ISLANDS? NOTHING, THAT'S WHAT. IT'S GOT CUTE GRAPHICS AND STUFF AND IT'S DEAD HARD… SO? BRING ON NEW ZEALAND STORY FOR A BETTER, CUTER AND HARDER GAME.

RALPH MILNE'S LEFT FOOT

WAY TOO HARD AND STUPID-LOOKING BOSSES. PARASOL STARS WAS WHAT THIS SHOULD HAVE BEEN."

SHINOBI

Best moment

Stuart I have two: crushing an enemy beneath a rainbow and then seeing it transform into a coloured jewel that I desperately needed – it was the equivalent of opening up a pack of Panini stickers and finding one inside you wanted; the other is finally defeating any one of the game's frustrating latter bosses by a complete stroke of luck and then proudly (but teary-eyed and red and sweat-faced usually) sticking two fingers up at the game – that was the equivalent of playing Serena Williams at tennis for six weeks and then winning a single point after her tennis racquet miraculously explodes mid set.

Rapidmollusc I think the best moment was a successful escape from the rising water level. Hardly Baron Von Blubba, though.

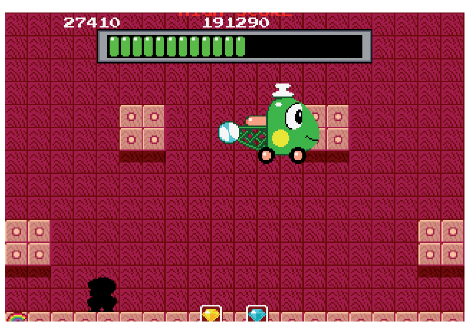
ShadowMan Managing to finally complete the Amiga version (with all gems), but being disappointed that you didn't get any of the extra worlds – it was still satisfying nonetheless. A close second would be beating the Vampire boss at the end of World 3. Took me many weeks to accomplish this but was immensely satisfying the first time I managed to kill him.

mrspud Up for jump! This is the only game up for jump works in. If you play the arcade version, remap up for jump and see how perfectly suited it is to the action.

JetSetWilly Finding the pots for three rainbows and fast rainbows, only to lose them a second later.



» Despite being a great game, *Rainbow Islands* disappointed a few people who just wanted more *Bubble Bobble*.



FURTHER PLAY

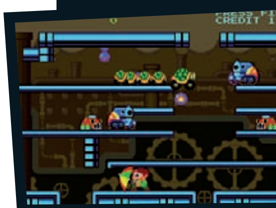
Similar titles you may want to try



BUBBLE BOBBLE

FEATURED SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR RELEASED: 1986

Twins Bub and Bob have been transformed into bubble-blowing dragons by the evil Hyper Drunk and must fight their way through 100 stages of platforming action to rescue their girlfriends and break the spell. The first game in the series, it was a huge success on its release thanks to cute visuals, a novel co-op mode, strategic gameplay and oodles of secrets.



PARASOL STARS

FEATURED SYSTEM: AMIGA
YEAR RELEASED: 1991

Never released in arcades (the game was written for and ported from the PC Engine), *Parasol Stars* is a sequel that continues on with *Rainbow Islands*-style gameplay as opposed to Bubble Bobble's, which was readopted for the sequels *Bubble Memories* and *Bubble Symphony*. The game basically just substitutes islands for planets, rainbows for parasols, and gems for stars.



BIONIC COMMANDO

FEATURED SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR RELEASED: 1987

If you're looking for another run-and-gun platformer with a climbing mechanic, then Capcom's *Bionic Commando* fits that bill. The game was notable for enforcing a jumping ban. Instead, its hero had to manoeuvre around the stage using a bionic arm that could be fired like a grappling hook. This game can also be a bit frustrating at times so Rainbow Islanders will feel right at home.



RAINBOW ISLANDS REVOLUTION

FEATURED SYSTEM: PSP
YEAR RELEASED: 2006

Not great by any stretch but certainly better than *Bubble Bobble Revolution*, this portable reimaging pulls together elements of *Bubble Bobble* and *Rainbow Islands*, while shoehorning the DS's touch-screen controls into the equation. With Bubby and Bobby now encased inside bubbles you must offer covering fire by drawing rainbows on screen to take down enemies while pulling the twins to safety.

MOMENTS IN TIME

Five moments in Rainbow Islands that could lead to some colourful language

1 DINOSORE POINT

You start up the game and quickly realise things play quite a bit differently to *Bubble Bobble*. Putting these differences aside though, you give the game a shot and are either instantly captivated by the pretty rainbows and jaunty music or leave the game in disgust to run off to bite the head off a Spider Goat to make yourself feel more of a man inside.



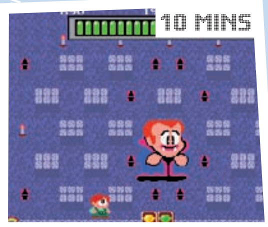


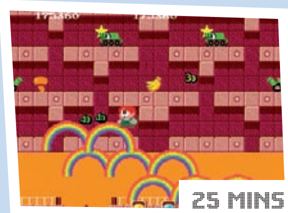
2 BADDY LONGLEGS

After a few minutes you come across the first, and arguably most iconic, boss in the game: this giant boot-wearing spider that bounces up and down around the screen. It's a pretty easy fight, just don't go crazy on the rainbow firing, and keep alternating from left to right to influence his actions.

3 BLOOD F'R

It's around this point you reach this frustrating giant boss-eyed Dracula man-child who will feast on your credits as if they were blood capsules. If you can defeat him with any hair left on your head then well done, you've just completed the third level of the game with hair on your head. There are officially seven more to go if you've been collecting the gems.





4 CHAOS EMERALDS

Toy Island is where the game starts to get difficult. The enemies on this stage are unpredictable, and ensnaring enemies underneath your rainbows requires real skill and patience. To top it all off you have to then face another maddening boss at the end of the stage.

5 BUBBLE TRUBBLE

If you're good enough, and have collected all of the gems, two days in and you should reach the game's true final boss: a giant bubble dinosaur. This boss fills the entire screen, and to make matters worse has two forms. If you defeat him, and have remembered to collect the three mirrors on each of the three special islands you're rewarded with the true ending to the game.



Sepp Salerno Turning a bug-eyed aphid into a trainer, or a martini glass with a rainbow for the first time. That and the triple rainbow.

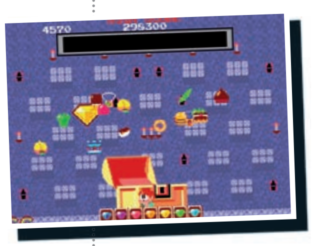
Denny Haynes When I reached the top of the first level and watched the jewels and such spew from chests.

Sir Arthur Only a few years ago playing the updated version on the PlayStation collection (same old *Rainbow Islands* but better graphics), I think it was a walking stick I collected and huge bags of gold started falling down the screen. Sure they were worth around ten thousand points each.

BellyFullOfHell Getting the four rainbow power-ups. Then realising it's useless because they vanish so quickly. I still get a kick out of getting the diamonds in the correct order and getting into the secret rooms as well.

Best conversion

Darran Trying to choose the best conversion of *Rainbow Islands* is extremely hard because there were so many great ones. All the 8-bit and 16-bit home computer efforts were absolutely marvellous to behold, but I also have very fond memories of the Mega Drive and Master System offerings. The best for me though is the PC Engine Super CD-ROM outing, not only is it arcade-perfect to look at and listen to, but unlike the very excellent Atari ST and Amiga ports, it has all the additional islands as well. The only downside now is that it's very expensive to get hold of.



Britnostalgic I've played nearly every 8-bit version out there; surely the Amstrad CPC version is up there with the best of them?

pottyboy I haven't played many of the conversions, but out of the few I've played, the Spectrum version is the best due to its colourful graphics (with almost no colour clash), excellent playability and the superb 128k music.

TwoHeadedBoy The Mega Drive version – it has the whole 'Extra' mode thing, plus the right music. Pretty much perfect in every way.

Greyfox A lot will say the good old Mega Drive version, but the home computer version has to be the 'Amiga' version, perfect for that machine at the time. It was bright and colourful, matched with witty gameplay.

ShadowMan It's the Amiga version for me. It had great graphics and super-smooth gameplay. The Master System version is also pretty good, the Saturn version was slightly disappointing for me since the music was worse and I wasn't fond of the new graphics. Gameplay-wise it's still spot on, though.

woody.cool Best 8-bit version is between Commodore 64 and Amstrad CPC, I think the CPC is better, though. Best 16-bit version has to go to the Commodore Amiga without a doubt. It's arcade-perfect and plays like a dream! Special mention also to the Speccy, which is bloody good despite the limitations of the machine – I was well impressed! I was also quite happy with the NES version too.





NEXT MONTH'S GAME

AXELAY

Want to join in the fun? Then head on over to **www.retrogamer.net/forum** now.



THE KIKSTART SERIES

Craig Grannell gets on his bike and tracks down **Shaun Southern** and **Andrew Morris** to find out more about the history of split-screen racing series Kikstart





IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** MASTERTRONIC

» **DEVELOPER:** MR CHIP SOFTWARE

» **PLATFORM:** KIKSTART: C64, ATARI 8-BIT, C16, C128
KIKSTART II: C64, AMIGA, AMSTRAD, SPECTRUM

» **RELEASED:** 1985–1987

» **GENRE:** RACING

» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1+ PER GAME

It's safe to say that 8-bit budget games were a bit of a lottery. For every *Thrust* there were a dozen or more £1.99 'specials' where you'd probably get more entertainment value hurling the cassette at a wall and watching it smash to pieces than loading it into your 8-bit bundle of computing joy. Shaun Southern's *Kikstart* series definitely ended up joining the 'classics' club, although it arguably took four games and three different platforms to get there – and although the original *Kikstart* on the C64 was praised at the time of release – it's difficult today to see how the hugely frustrating two-player side-on motocross game could end up spawning such a near-perfect sequel just two years later.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given that his game was named *Kikstart*, Southern confirms that he did, in fact, used to watch the not entirely dissimilarly named *Kick Start* on the BBC, which was a motorcycle trials show where contestants braved tough courses with steep banks, bunny hops and even the odd car. He notes that no other home videogames had any influence on his work, though: "In fact, I didn't have any other consoles, and even to this day I don't play many other games, although I used to play a fair bit in the arcades."

Like with Southern's other games, *Kikstart* happened very quickly, leveraging the capabilities of the platform he'd chosen to use. "The Commodore machines had decent graphics capabilities – scrolling, colour cycling, changing colours on raster lines – and so for fairly straightforward code, I knew I could create a fast game," he says, adding: "*Kikstart* really didn't push the C64 that much."

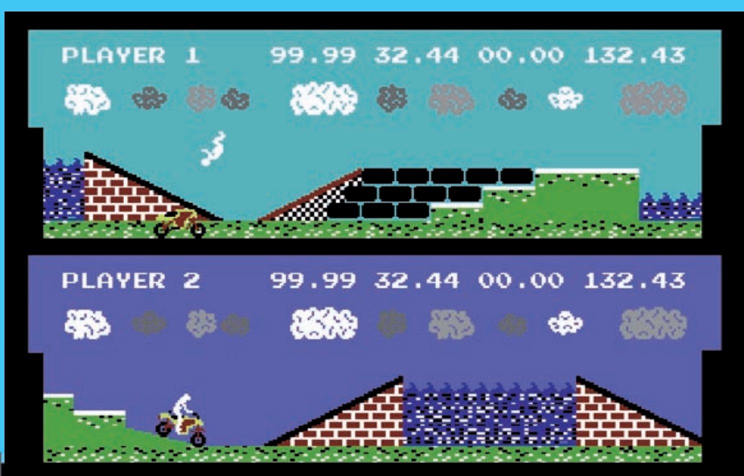
When it comes to the game's design, Southern notes that he had everything worked out from the start, including the split-screen two-player mode, which was still a relatively new gaming device in 1985: "I'd decided from the beginning to make the game split-screen, and, to be honest, I'm not sure what I'd have done with the space if it had just been a one-player game! In two-player mode, I liked the split-screen, because even though you weren't interacting – one player's actions never affected the other player – you could still race against a friend. This was something that became a recurring theme in many of my subsequent games."

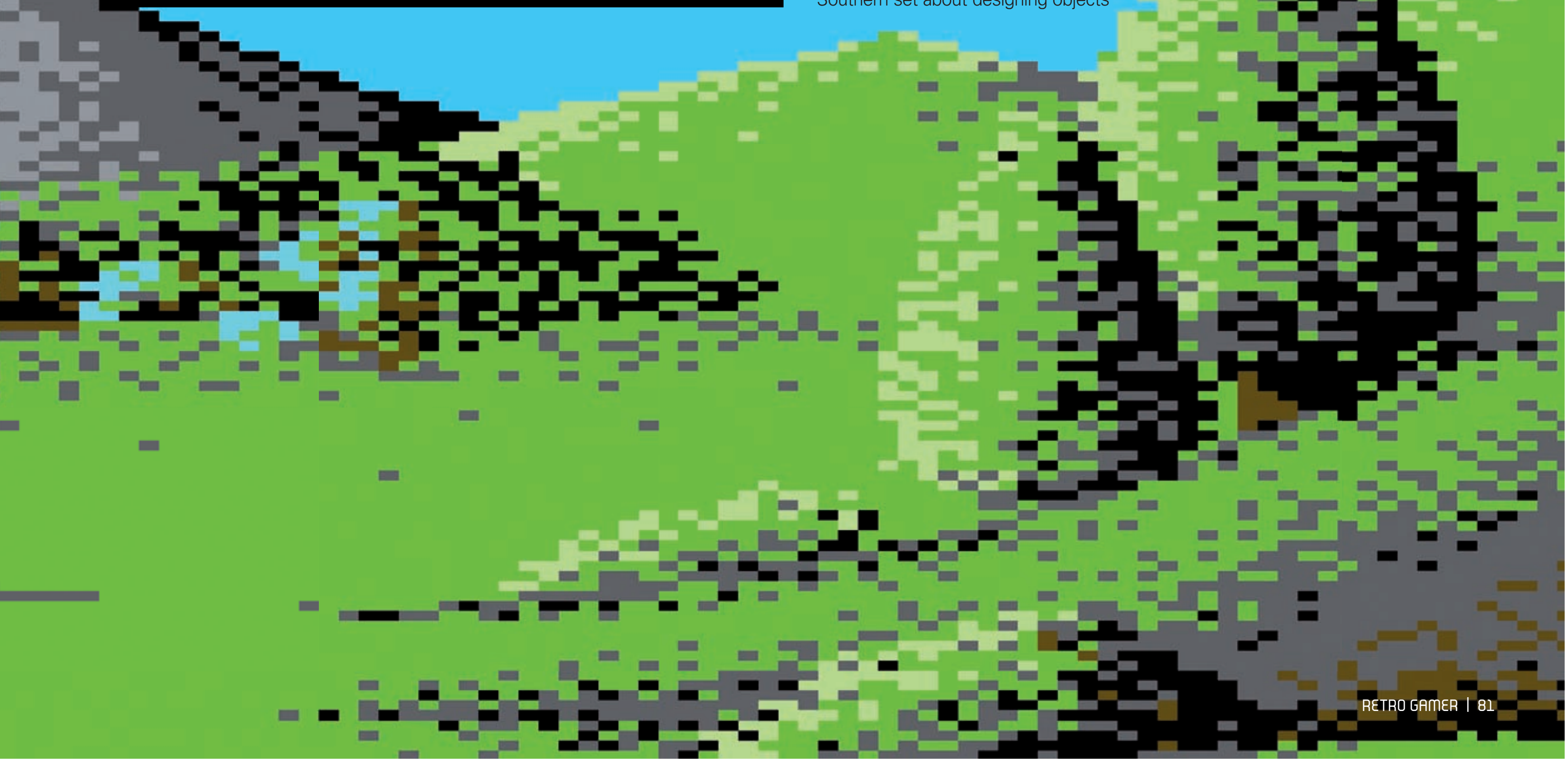
With the basics of the game in place, Southern set about designing objects and courses, and he puts to rest one long-standing puzzle about *Kikstart*: the identity of graphic artist 'Bishy'. "I did the graphics myself on *Kikstart*… I think you can tell," he laughs. "Since the software company published the games, the odd person's name often sneaked in somewhere." And on *Kikstart*'s course objects, the *Kick Start* TV show most influenced Southern, although only from a graphical standpoint rather than in terms of realism: "I'm not really sure how easy it is to ride a bike over gates, tyres and mud, nor through flames!"

Kikstart was a huge success for Mastertronic, selling over 280,000 copies, but Southern, in hindsight, considers the game a near miss: "It's just on the annoying side of frustrating. The game builds up tension, but it was always too hard to 'guess' when you were about to go too fast, and there was no feedback."

For the next two *Kikstart* games, released in quick succession, Southern flirted with two of Commodore's less popular machines. First, for the C16, he created a game only superficially similar to the C64 original. The single-player game still tasked a motocross rider with completing tough courses

» [C64] Player one is sent flying from his bike. To be fair, it's not terribly easy to ride over giant springs.







» [Spectrum] The graphics aren't much cop, but the Speccy *Kikstart II* conversion plays well enough.

within a set time limit, but the scale and gameplay were far more arcade-oriented: there were huge leaps, lightning from low-flying clouds to avoid, and balloon-capture for extra points.

"I copied some of that stuff from an arcade game," admits Southern, referring to the obscure *Superbike*. "And thinking about it, I'm not sure why I didn't do the C16 game like the C64 one – the C16 was almost as powerful." On reflection, Southern thinks deadlines were perhaps to blame: "A lot of my games at the time were done very quickly, and I recall C16 *Kikstart* only took me a week. But I think it was a fun game, even without the longer-lasting gameplay of the C64 version."

The next *Kikstart* game was created for the C128, scoring a massive 96% in *Zzap!64*, but it had an identity crisis, since it was referred to as both *Kikstart* and *Kikstart 2*, and shouldn't be confused with *Kikstart II* for the C64, which would arrive a year later.

"I doubt the game was my idea. It sounds like more of a marketing thing," says Southern, racking his brains about the reasoning behind creating a sequel for a platform bereft of games. "Of course, it had to be different to the C64 version, and so creating a load of extra tracks was a pretty easy option."

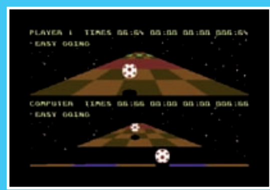
A less easy element from a programming standpoint that's found within the C128 game – and the thing that makes it a more obvious bridge between the two C64 *Kikstart* titles – is the AI opponent in single-player mode. Rather than the bottom half of the screen being empty if you're a lone player, C128 *Kikstart* has the computer racing you to each track's finishing line. "I figured that there was no point in having a split-screen and not using it," says Southern. And as we comment that the AI has a clear early example of a 'catch-up' mechanism, making it far more forgiving than Southern's own *Trailblazer*, he says: "I wanted to keep the races exciting, and to ensure that the AI opponent didn't just run away with it every time. It took a bit of getting right, though. It's hard to play at different levels of expertise yourself!"

The final chapter of the *Kikstart* series saw the game return to the C64, and Southern was this time joined by Andrew Morris, who went on to work with him for a number of years. "After seeing the original *Kikstart*, I had ideas for new features and better graphics, and I worked with Shaun on a lot of these," remembers Morris. "On the visual front, Shaun did the graphics on the original, and he's not really an artist – just as I'm not really a programmer. I saw lots of potential for improvement, and set about working on new designs with my Koala Pad."

As the graphics were being tweaked, so too was the gameplay. "By the time you've worked on one or two games in a series, you know what works and what doesn't," says Southern. "Other *Kikstart* games were annoying because of the 'sudden deaths' that occurred if you were going at the wrong speed on an obstacle, and so we added a speedometer. You still had to work out how fast you could go on certain things, but it removed the guesswork."

Another change was a speed-up device after a fall that would accelerate your being placed at a safe restart point – a feature added because Southern thought "it was so annoying having to wait to restart, and it just put players off so much". Night and snow levels were also added to the mix, the latter reducing your bike's acceleration. "It all adds to the fun. On night levels, you could easily mistake one obstacle for another, leading to exciting races," says Southern.

"We also added these to get more variety into the visuals and to change the feel of some of the levels when playing the game," recalls Morris, adding that this became a recurring theme in the pair's output, including *Lotus Esprit Turbo Challenge* and *Super Cars*. This device worked well, especially on night courses peppered with fire hazards, such as



PUBLISHER HIGHLIGHTS

TRAILBLAZER (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: AMSTRAD, ATARI 8-BIT, ATARI ST, C16 AND PLUS/4, C64, GIZMONDO, MSX, SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1986

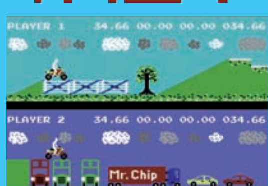
P.O.D.: PROOF OF DESTRUCTION
SYSTEM: AMIGA, C16 AND PLUS/4, C64, GIZMONDO, SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1986

LOTUS ESPRIT TURBO CHALLENGE
SYSTEM: AMIGA, AMSTRAD, ATARI ST, C64, SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1990

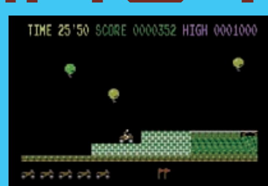
> "When I check it out on an emulator these days, I can't believe I had the patience to play it!"



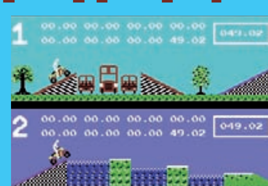
THE KIKSTART SERIES



Kikstart (C64)
The original *Kikstart*, according to the very first **Retro Gamer**, sold over 285,000 copies. Although *Kikstart* today is a frustrating and unrewarding game, the ingredients for its superior C64 sequel were in place from the start, including the split-screen two-player mode and tracks full of varied obstacles.



Kikstart (C16 and Plus/4)
The oddball of the series, *Kikstart* for the C16 simplified the C64 game and smashed it into obscure coin-op *Superbike*. The result: a fun arcade game that felt perfectly suited to the C64's little brother – although that didn't stop Jason Kelk porting the game to the C64 itself in 2007.



Kikstart (C128)
Sometimes confusingly referred to as *Kikstart 2*, despite the game's title screen, attract screen and packaging all quite clearly saying '*Kikstart*', the C128 version provided more tracks and some new obstacles. These updates came at a price, though: £4.99 – three quid more than *Kikstart* for the C64.



Kikstart II
The final *Kikstart* game returned 'home' to the C64, and to its original price tag of £1.99. And Mastertronic could easily have nabbed an extra coin for this fantastic game, which was the prettiest, most fun of them all. It also added a construction kit, so you could create your own courses.



» [C64] Depending on your point of view, *Super Scramble Simulator* is '*Kikstart Pro*' or '*Kikstart Ruined*'.

SUPER SCRAMBLE SIMULATOR



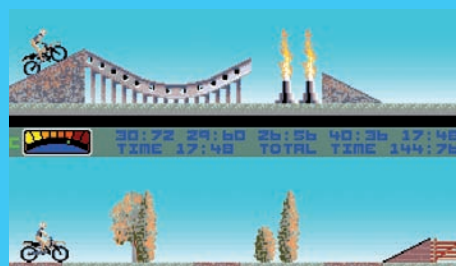
ALTHOUGH THE *KIKSTART* series ended with *Kikstart II*, Southern and Morris weren't entirely done with motocross games, creating *Super Scramble Simulator* for Gremlin Graphics in 1989. However, rather than releasing yet another budget arcade-oriented racer, *Super Scramble Simulator* was a full-priced game that proved divisive, due to its often-finicky simulation approach. "We knew we could take the *Kikstart* idea further with better graphics and more features, and I got the idea to use a split-screen with a side-on and top-down view from *Super Locomotive* in the arcades," recalls Morris. "I thought this could add an extra dimension to the game, long before 3D was a possibility."

On the game itself, which took far longer to master than *Kikstart*, Morris admits that "people missed the two-player option", but says the main idea was to make something new: "We weren't interested in creating the same game again."

Southern is colder towards the Gremlin title. "I think we got so lost in trying to make it look good that it turned out to be too difficult and annoying to play," he says in a matter-of-fact manner.



» [C64] The original *Kikstart*'s eight courses are particularly tricky to get through without falling.



» [Amiga] The oddly garish Amiga *Kikstart II* conversion has handling more reminiscent of the original *Kikstart*.



» [C64] It's all got too much for player one, who decides to take a nap.



» [C64] The bonus level in *CJ's Elephant Antics* bears more than a passing resemblance to C16 *Kikstart*.

'The Fire At Night', and both Morris and Southern agree that fire turned out to be the game's best obstacle. "The fire added a lot of visual drama and was fun to try and negotiate," continues Morris.

"The flames added another perspective, with you having to time your jumps, not just get to the end as quickly as possible – although you could just hope for the best and floor it," suggests Southern, helpfully.

While the tweaks to *Kikstart II*'s gameplay were welcome, it was another component that really caught the imagination of the day's gamers: a construction kit. We ask the pair whether this was a development tool that was reworked for the public, or if it was a consideration from day one – the answer, apparently, is both. "We needed an editor to design the game's courses, and so we thought it would be a good idea to spend a bit more time on it, adding user-friendly icons and controls, and then make it part of the game," says Morris.

"I think people had been asking for a construction kit, and so it was definitely a good addition to *Kikstart II*, and once you've run out of tracks, it's the obvious thing to do: make your own," thinks Southern. "That we made it so easy to use made it even better. Every graphic block was pre-stored, so all you had to do was select and paste. You could create whatever you wanted and the game would let you play it. If the kit had been complicated, people would have been put off. It did close the door on any expansion packs, though!"

Southern also adds that things like *Kikstart II*'s construction kit highlight why sequels aren't always a bad thing in gaming: "The beauty of working on a sequel is that the game is already there, and so you have all that time to add new features that would have taken too long for the first game."

It also enabled the game's code to be tightly honed, and so whereas the original *Kikstart* had just eight courses and no computer opponent, *Kikstart II* boasted 24 tracks, an AI opponent, and a construction kit – all in a single load. "Because we used blocks to make up the track, they took up very little room," explains Southern.

Unusually for a sequel, *Kikstart II* almost matched its predecessor for sales, just falling short of the original by a few thousand copies. It's also a budget release that's fondly remembered by many gamers of the time – particularly C64 owners. And so, with *Trailblazer* for the iPhone waiting in the wings, we wondered whether there was any chance of *Kikstart* making a comeback.

"Well, it's available on the iPhone via the C64 emulator, but I think there have been a lot of better games of that kind out since 1987, with proper physics and far superior graphics," says Southern, dashing our hopes. On mulling it over, he says, "Maybe we could make a cartoon-style version," but adds that it's "not top of the list for a remake".

Despite not considering it ripe for a remake, Southern remains fond of the final *Kikstart* game: "It's definitely my favourite, although when I check it out on an emulator these days, I can't believe I had the patience to play it!"

In hindsight, he says he'd have perhaps made the game a little more forgiving: "Maybe the bike should have started to wobble before you fell off, giving you a chance to correct it. I guess I just had a lot more patience back in the old days!"

THE UNCONVERTED

Arcade games that never made it home



IN DEPTH

» Picking up giant coins spins the slot reel at the top of the screen, which drops bonuses and power-ups into the stage.

» Enemies are defeated by feeding them these things. When they eat enough of them they swell in size and can be kicked around the screen, destroying enemies as they go.

» Get hit by any food and your hero will pile on the pounds. As you would expect, this affects his or her agility, making life more difficult.



DIET GO GO

■ **Developer:** Data East ■ **Year Released:** 1992 ■ **Genre:** Platformer

■ **A mixture of *Bubble Bobble* and *Snow Bros* is a good way to describe this quirky single-screen platformer from Data East. Its whimsical premise finds two fitness freaks battling through various themed worlds, inhabited by killer plants, sentient bags of French fries, vampire bats and UFOs, to defeat an evil scientist. The reasons for this unusual mission are never made clear – you get an abstract introduction of the aforementioned scientist looking over Earth all threateningly before seeing him fly over a city, dropping junk food over its citizens like a nutty superhero. You must help these two hyperactive kids dart around the screen feeding all the creatures on screen until they become so fat that they turn into helium balloons and start floating up towards the ceiling, evocative of *Bubble Bobble*. At this point the kids can safely push their bloated adversaries, causing them to dart around the screen, killing everything.**

The aim of each stage is to clear the screen of enemies, but this is made difficult by them being deadly to touch and firing projectile food at you, which, if it hits you, will fatten up your character and make them sluggish. Once in this state they cannot consume any more food, otherwise they keel over and die – explaining why these kids are so precious about their weight: one meal a day is all they can stomach.

A nice aspect of *Diet Go Go* is a slot machine wheel that sits at the top of the screen. The wheel is activated with the collection of large coins that appear on the stage, and releases gems and power-ups – such as health drinks, speed boots and a screen-cleansing push pump that inflates all enemies on the screen – into the game. There's also an enjoyable little bonus game between some levels that launches your heroes into the clouds, where they must catch gems while avoiding falling food.

Each world ends on a boss fight, which acts as a nice touch too, and each boss must be defeated through the feeding, fattening up and firing of the enemy minions surrounding them on screen. While enjoyable, the biggest issue we have with *Diet Go Go* is the fact that the game can become quite repetitive about halfway in. *Diet Go Go* wasn't a massive hit for Data East, which is likely the reason why it was never officially released outside Japan, so your best chance of experiencing it is through emulation. If you're looking for an unusual platform game, this appetising little title should certainly leave a sweet taste in your mouth.



CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

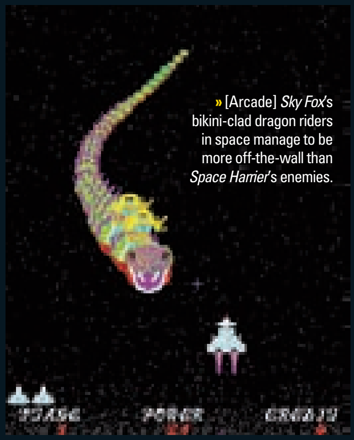
SNOW BROS 1990

Released a few years before *Diet Go Go*, Toaplan's *Snow Bros* is an uncannily similar game: just supplant the mechanic of fattening up enemies with turning them into giant snowballs. The game also features similar visuals and power-ups, but was released on a few home formats, including the NES, Mega Drive and Game Boy.

SKY FOX (AKA EXERIZER)

■ **Developer:** Jaleco ■ **Year Released:** 1987 ■ **Genre:** Shoot-'em-up

■ **It's fair to say that Jaleco's arcade output is dubious at best, with the Japanese developer releasing a large quantity of arcade titles throughout the Eighties and early Nineties, many of which never found a home release, owing to them basically not being very good.** *Sky Fox*, then, can be seen as a bit of a diamond in the rough, as it's a nicely presented little-known vertical shooter that plays like a mixture of *Galaxian* and *Space Harrier*. Probably the most novel aspect about the game is the fact that the player's ship has two attack methods: rockets and lasers, with lasers being the fastest, and thus preferred, mode of attack to cleanse the screen of foes. To fire lasers, though, the ship requires power, which can only be absorbed by killing enemies, many of which – mainly the *Space Harrier* dragon-a-likes – must be destroyed by a shot to the head, so accuracy and timing is key. This banking and careful consideration to attacking enemies is a neat mechanic, which, coupled with *Sky Fox*'s nice visuals and humorous enemy designs, makes it an enjoyable little shooter.

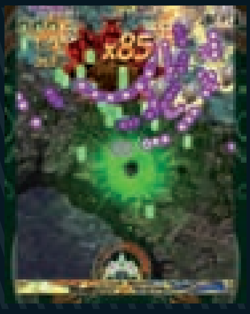


» [Arcade] *Sky Fox*'s bikini-clad dragon riders in space manage to be more off-the-wall than *Space Harrier*'s enemies.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

ESPGALUDA II 2005

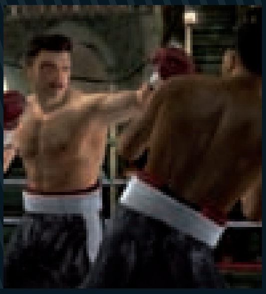
When we were thinking up great vertical shooters with fantastic dual-fire systems, one game immediately sprang to mind: Cave's fantastic *Espgaluda II*. This exhilarating bullet hell shooter game was recently ported across to the Xbox 360 and iPhone, and both are flawless conversions of the arcade smash.



CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

FIGHT NIGHT 2004

Yes, we know it's not retro, nor even an arcade game for that matter, but *Fight Night* really is the closest contemporary to *Pound For Pound*. Using the trackball to land punches was a stroke of genius, as it offers an unparalleled sense of control over your fighter, and a similar control method is adopted by *Fight Night*.



POUND FOR POUND

■ **Developer:** Irem ■ **Year Released:** 1987 ■ **Genre:** Sports

■ **Pound for pound, this boxing game from Irem isn't the greatest the world has ever seen, but fans of the genre should certainly check it out.** *Pound For Pound*'s birds-eye perspective initially feels quite odd and makes the game look like it's about two semi-naked men fighting in a lift, but for the most part it actually works quite well. This is helped by the game having an intelligent control system built around trackball controls: holding a punch button while spinning the ball in various directions actuates various jabs, uppercuts and body blows – an approach, of course, that was later used and refined to great effect in EA's excellent *Fight Night* series. It works really well to bake a natural ebb and flow into the fights – but just ensure that, if you're discovering it via MAME, you're playing it with an analogue pad, as without one the game is almost unplayable. This is probably why *Pound For Pound* never found a home release: on conventional D-pads this game just wouldn't have worked as well.



» [Arcade] Modern boxing games have proven how far ahead of its time *Pound For Pound* was.

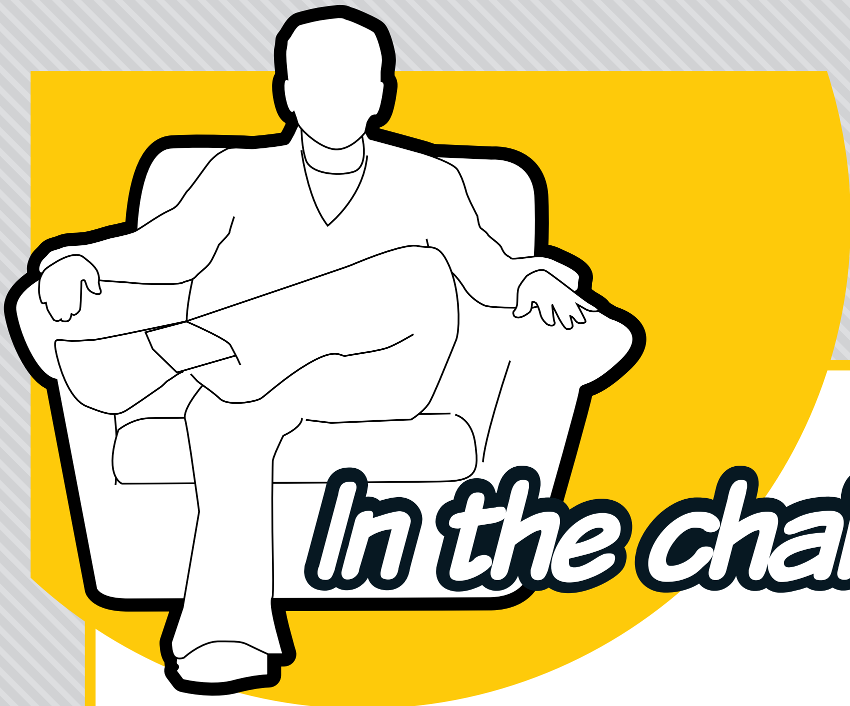
BEST LEFT IN THE ARCADE

SASUKE VS COMMANDER

■ **Developer:** SNK ■ **Year Released:** 1980 ■ **Genre:** Shoot-'em-up

■ **This quirky shmup from SNK takes Namco's *Galaxian* and applies the gameplay to a feudal Japan setting.** Playing a little dude called Sasuke, you are sent to protect a shogun from waves of tiny attacking ninja. As the enemies cascade down the screen, firing shurikens like hyperactive madmen, Sasuke must hit them with poisonous darts while also being very careful to avoid their corpses as they hit the ground. Once the screen is cleared of all enemies, the action then flits to a boss fight against a giant fire-breathing ninja before it all repeats. The biggest problem with *Sasuke vs Commander* is that there's very little variety, and as such it doesn't hold your attention for long. The enemy sprites can be difficult to see against the game's garish backgrounds, making the later stages quite maddening, and the game also has a frustrating difficulty curve. Certainly not SNK's finest hour, it must be said. Then again, it's not a fighting game, is it?



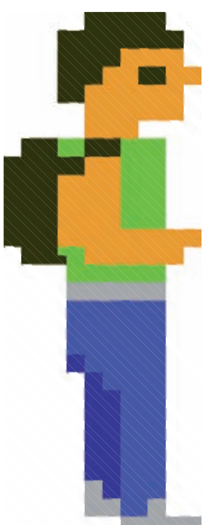


In the chair with...

DAVID CRANE

He's the designer of the bestselling game on one of the most iconic videogame consoles in history, and co-founder of the largest and most significant videogame company to come out of the Eighties. Join us as we look back on David Crane's amazing career

Following a telling company memo and a life-changing game of tennis, Crane left Atari in 1979 to form Activision with fellow Atari coders Larry Kaplan, Alan Miller, Bob Whitehead and music industry exec Jim Levy. Here this talented collective aimed to create original, high quality VCS titles, award programmers recognition for their work, and, most importantly, separate the software business from the hardware. Having completed his 68th published game, David chats to Stuart Hunt about his prolific career and shares his thoughts on the new-generation Activision…



RETRO GAMER: Thanks for giving up your time to speak with us today, David. Tell us, what did you want to do when you were at school?

DAVID CRANE: There were three main factors driving me through my early years at school. First, I was always fascinated with technology and engineering. I found it difficult to imagine that anyone could look at a television screen, for example, and not want to understand how a picture could be plucked out of thin air and 'painted' onto the back surface of a glass tube. By the time I was 12 years old I knew the answer to that question and thousands of other technological mysteries. Second, when we are young we don't have the financial resources to simply buy something to fill a need, so I became an inventor. Using junk from around the garage, or parts from an Erector Set, I tinkered in the basement at all hours (when I was supposed to be studying). Some examples include:

When our small town first opened a community swimming pool I spent so much time there that I sunburned my shoulders to a crisp. I built a foot-pedal-operated mechanism attached to the wall that sprayed my shoulders with sunburn spray.

For a science fair I designed and built an unbeatable Tic-Tac-Toe machine using nothing but rotary switches and lights. Sadly, it went up in smoke the night before the competition.

When I received an old, used black and white television as a birthday gift I dismantled it so that I could have the channel tuner near my bedside and the TV in a cabinet on my wall.

To impress the neighbourhood I fashioned a 'laser' that, in a flash of light, could ignite a match at the far end of a workbench (a loop of Nichrome wire around the match head completed that illusion).

Finally, my mother, an artist trained in a number of painting styles, made sure I experienced the arts. I took watercolour painting classes and such, but I never developed much of an interest. A painting took too long to perfect, and when you were finished you only had a single copy. So besides getting a little right-brain training I also learned the value of mass production.

Given these factors I was certain that I would end up designing household gadgets to improve the quality of people's lives. I had the technological skills to make almost anything work, and I had just enough aesthetic training to understand the need for look and feel. Ironically, videogame design was even a better fit for that combination of skills. But as I was growing up there was no such thing as a videogame, so how could I know?

RG: Tell us about your first experience with a computer…

DC: Home computers did not arrive until I was in college. But mainframe computers from IBM could be found in some businesses, and I had a lucky connection. I was in the Boy Scouts, and my Scoutmaster worked in data processing. On a visit to his office I became fascinated with the equipment. I asked to be one of the first to attempt to earn the newly created Computer Merit Badge. Through his help and access to his facility, I learned the Hollerith code for punched cards (I still remember



SELECTED TIMELINE

- Outlaw 1978
- Canyon Bomber 1978
- Slot Machine 1979
- Fishing Derby 1980
- Dragster 1980
- Laser Blast 1981
- Freeway 1981
- Pitfall! 1982
- Grand Prix 1982
- The Activision Decathlon 1983
- Pitfall II: Lost Caverns 1983
- Ghostbusters 1984
- Little Computer People 1985
- Transformers: The Computer Game 1986
- Skate Boardin': A Radical Adventure 1987
- Super Skateboardin' 1988
- A Boy And His Blob: Trouble On Blobolonia 1989
- Rescue of Princess Blobette 1990
- Bart Simpson's Escape from Camp Deadly 1991
- David Crane's Amazing Tennis 1992
- T*O*Y*S 1993
- Home Improvement: Power Tool Pursuit 1994
- Arcade Bowling 2009
- Ten Pin Championship Bowling 2009
- Boardwalk Games 2009
- Iron Horse 2010

"To impress the neighbourhood I fashioned a 'laser' that in a flash of light could ignite a match at the far end of a workbench"

that code), and got a good grounding in the technologies involved.

A few years later, in high school I attended a computer programming extension campus. I travelled by bus every morning to a nearby city, studied computers for three hours, and returned to my normal school for the afternoon. I was one of the few people in the Seventies to leave high school programming computers in three languages.

RG: And what was the first game you actually encountered?

DC: My parents bought the first Magnavox Odyssey home game console. This unit displayed squares of light on the screen with no graphics. Magnavox supplied coloured overlays that you would stick on the TV screen to make different games. I have to admit that I was bored by the rudimentary games, but I was fascinated by the potential of the technology.

RG: When did you first think: I could make a career out of this?

DC: It would be years before I thought of making a career in videogames. My head was brimming with inventions. Tired of resetting digital clocks after a power failure I invented a clock that derived its display by communicating over a power-line-interface with a master clock. To accompany me as I learned to play the guitar I created a programmable drum machine (I even tried to market that one through one of those late-night infomercial invention marketing companies). I even designed a 3D TV using a flat, spinning phosphor target inside an evacuated sphere.

I had too many things to invent – who had time for games?

RG: What did your parents think about you joining the industry?

DC: My parents helped me move to Silicon Valley after college. They looked around and saw ten high-tech businesses per block, and they knew I

FIVE TO PLAY

PITFALL!



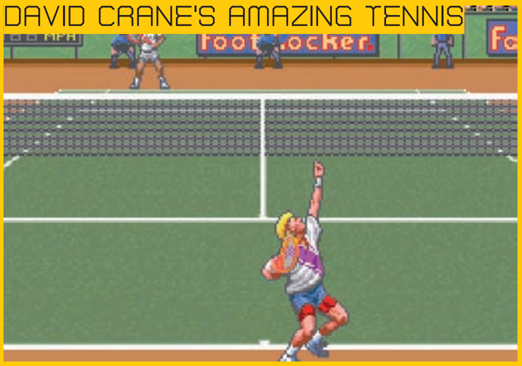
THE CONCEPT MAY have taken David ten minutes to think up, but that didn't stop *Pitfall!* becoming the bestselling 2600 game of all time, selling over 4 million copies on the console alone. The game saw an adventurer named Pitfall Harry on a mission to find 32 pieces of treasure while having to negotiate various environmental hazards and deadly creatures along the way. *Pitfall!* was praised for its quality visuals, slick gameplay and animation, and quickly gained interest from VCS owners on its release owing that there was nothing else like it on the machine. The game's popularity and success helped to bring David and Activision immediately to the fore, and in the following year a sequel, *Pitfall 2: Lost Caverns*, was released. The follow-up was notable for featuring scrolling and for expanding and refining all areas of the game.

A BOY AND HIS BLOB: TROUBLE ON BLOBOLONIA



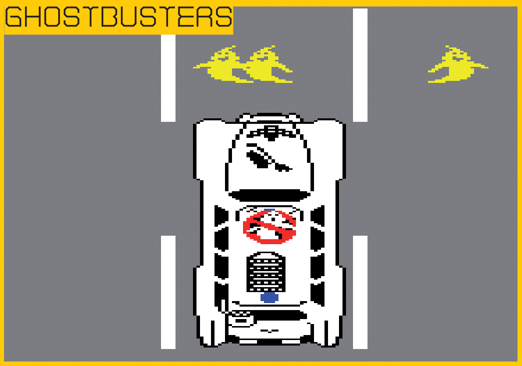
AFTER FINISHING *PITFALL 2*, David left the action/adventure game genre for a while and didn't return to it until 1989 with the release of this quirky NES platformer. *A Boy And His Blob* shares many similarities with the *Pitfall!* series. Where the games differ is *A Boy A His Blob*'s unique buddy system: the player controls the boy but is aided on their quest by a computer-controlled character named Blob, who acts like an obedient pet during the game. The player can influence Blob's actions by feeding him different flavoured jellybeans that transform him into a variety of useful objects to solve the game's puzzles. Released solely for the NES, the game was a huge hit.

DAVID CRANE'S AMAZING TENNIS



GIVEN THAT DAVID is a huge fan of tennis it comes as little surprise that he would decide to marry his passion for the sport with videogames, and in 1992 he did just that when he released *David Crane's Amazing Tennis* – a comprehensive tennis simulator. The game was notable for featuring a 3D court and an attention-grabbing perspective: the camera was positioned just behind the camera as opposed to above the court, which gave the game a more realistic feel. The game also featured a host of customisation options, as well as a large amount of shot types – such as lobs, slices, back and topspin, left or right-handed play – and slow-motion replays too.

GHOSTBUSTERS



ONLY DAVID CRANE could turn the most successful comedy film of the Eighties into a business sim and still capture the magic of the movie so brilliantly. Activision's *Ghostbusters* plonked players inside the slime-covered boots of the eponymous team of paranormal exterminators. Starting out by purchasing your very own Ecto-1, you equipped your team with various gadgets before traversing the many blocks of New York City, busting ghosts until your inevitable date with Gozer. Turned around in just six weeks, *Ghostbusters* boasted fantastic visuals, a catchy rendition of the theme tune, and varied gameplay you'd boot up time and time again, even after completion.

LITTLE COMPUTER PEOPLE



UNDOUBTEDLY A PRECURSOR to the Tamagotchi and Will Wright's super-successful *Sims* series, the high concept behind *Little Computer People* caused quite a stir on its release. The original idea can be credited to artist/musician Rich Gold, who came to Activision with an idea to produce a software version of the Pet Rock. Activision invested thousands in the project, and David helped Gold refine the concept – adding the interactivity and communication element that existed between the player and their suited man-pet. Amazingly, each LCP was unique to each disk, meaning each copy of the game would play slightly differently to the next.

would be fine. To them Atari was just another computer business (my Mom was soon even happier, because I made her a *Slot Machine* game that she could play at home any time, day or night).

RG: What jobs did you do before working at Atari?

DC: My first job in the Valley was as a technician at National Semiconductor. I had worked for a couple of years at school as the lab professor's technician. When he created new lab projects for students I had to build them first and help tweak them for the class. I also built my first computer in college – a machine that plays Tic-Tac-Toe (which still works).

With all of the experience I had working with digital circuits, I recognised that there were some fields of electronics with which I had no practical experience. I took the job at National working with linear integrated circuits, stunning my advisors (that is as far away from computer chips that you can get). But I had a plan. To be the inventor I wanted to be, I needed to be proficient in many areas of electronic design. That job was just the next step in my career development.

RG: Can you tell us what was it like working at Atari?

DC: I wasn't sure I would like programming games. My first love has always been designing electronic circuits, and this would be only programming. As it turned out I still got my fill of circuit design over the years, developing a number of electronic circuits to help make game design easier. But I found that I enjoyed microprocessor programming and game design.

The working environment in my first days at Atari was very rewarding. My co-workers were dedicated professionals working hard to advance the state of gaming. Nolan Bushnell would come by occasionally to see what cool thing we were working on – although his catch word was "neat". The hot tub parties in the lobby and drug use in the office was long past, which is good because I wouldn't have tolerated that. I was only there for two years before Atari lost its way. I got out and started Activision just in time.

RG: How many games did you work on there?

DC: While at Atari I designed and programmed: *Outlaw*, *Slot Machine* and *Canyon Bomber/Depth Charge*. Then the Atari 800 computer needed software help so all of the original 2600 game designers stepped up and wrote the operating system for Atari's new line of personal computers.



RG: So tell us about the genesis of Activision; how was it formed?

DC: A lot went wrong at Atari in 1979, in spite of the fact that they were making $100 million per year selling videogame cartridges. They made a classic mistake, one that is repeated over and over in every business. They didn't follow rule number one: If you make your living on creative products, keep your creative talent happy.

Four of Atari's most successful game designers: Larry Kaplan, Alan Miller, Bob Whitehead and I tended to hang around together. One day we discovered that we four had created games that accounted for 60 per cent of Atari's $100M in game cartridge sales for the previous year. We were making less than $30K salaries.

When we asked Atari's new president (Nolan was no longer there) for a piece of the action, we were told 'You are no more important to the success of those products than the person on the assembly line who puts them together.'

We didn't agree so we left to form our own game publishing company. We met up with Jim Levy and together created Activision.



» David invented many things before designing games, including a programmable drum machine.

> "I was only there for two years before Atari lost its way. I got out and started Activision just in time"

RG: You must have felt tremendous satisfaction when you were finally given credit for the games you made…

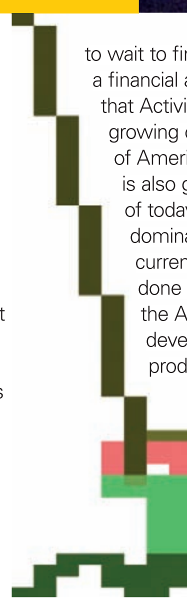
DC: That was a founding premise of the company. We started our own publishing house because we felt that people would like to know who authored their favourite game so that they could buy their next one.

What was really fun was going into the game store the day our first four games shipped. The owner of the store was just unpacking the boxes and looking at our pictures as we entered the store. He did a classic double-take.

RG: When you co-founded Activision in 1979 did you ever anticipate it would become one of the biggest companies in the industry?

DC: At the founding of the company, videogames were largely considered a fad. We certainly knew better. The videogame provided a way to interact with your TV, which promised a more immersive experience than either television or movies. And both television and movies had proven themselves to be more than just a fad.

The Activision of the 1980s very quickly became the biggest company in the industry. So we didn't have long to wait to find that out. At one point a financial analyst made the case that Activision was the fastest-growing company in the history of American business. I think it is also great that the Activision of today has regained that dominance. The company's current management has done a great job of leveraging the Activision name and developing cutting-edge products that continue to keep it at the top.



RG: What would you say was the secret to Activision's early success?

DC: In the early days of Activision our primary focus was quality. We continued to work on a game until the whole group could say it's as good as it's going to get. Most times that meant a whole lot of rewriting and tweaking. And sometimes a game never reached that threshold and it was shelved.

Uncertain schedules played havoc with the sales and marketing folks, making it hard to predict when the next game would be coming. But

after a while we got pretty good at predicting, and we were able to commit to a number of games from each designer (we just couldn't say what the game would be until it was finished).

We were the small, upstart company so we couldn't let our players down. And we succeeded… People raved that each Activision game was better than the last, and far ahead of the competition.

RG: Activision had always striven to create new IP instead of arcade ports. Why was this?

DC: That was a sign of the times. The Atari 2600 was designed to bring Atari's arcade games to the home. A lot of the game development time at Atari was taken up making home versions or their arcade games. Activision didn't own any arcade hits, so we had to create new games from scratch. Of course, that was more fun anyway.

The market was pretty small at that time as well. When there are only two dozen games on the shelf, a buyer can study all of them before making a choice. Once there were hundreds of games it made sense to attach a pre-sold label to a game.

RG: And how do you think the Activision of yesterday compares to the one of today?

DC: There is no comparison. The Activision of the Eighties was a research project. Every aspect of the business, from technology through marketing had to be invented. You could fill a textbook with the ideas pioneered by the over-achievers who flocked to work at Activision. And many of those ideas are still in use today.

Today's Activision is a highly evolved publishing business. They are very good at what they do. But to try to compare the two companies would be like comparing America's founding fathers to Washington DC of 2010.

RG: Where did the idea for *Little Computer People* originate?

DC: The germ of the idea came from an artist/musician by the name of Rich Gold. He wanted to make a software version of the Pet Rock. He raised some money and had some early programming done before showing it to Activision. I saw the start he had made and was intrigued. Activision covered his expenses and spent several hundred thousand dollars more on the project, including almost a year of my time.

Rich's idea had a flaw. The beauty of the Pet Rock was that you could sell for something that cost nothing for ten dollars, but only if you surrounded it with a great story. *Little Computer People* (which was originally called Pet Person) was the opposite. Its cost was astronomical, so it had to be sold at a high price, and therefore it had to provide some real entertainment value.

I added interactivity, communicating both to and from your LCP. Our marketing department surrounded it with a compelling story about gremlins living in your computer, etc. I worked with the production department to figure out how to make every disk unique, each with its own special LCP. It was one of the most demanding software projects developed in the 1980s. We weren't sending a man to the moon or anything, but we created a convincing life form inside the Commodore 64.

RG: Why do you think the *Pitfall!* franchise has proven to be so popular over the years?

DC: First, the platform game genre was the most expandable style of game on the early consoles. A game designer could take the player to any world that he could envision (as long as the console could display that vision).

Second, even as the first of its genre, *Pitfall!* provided a lot of game play. Within the limits of a 4KB ROM, it was rare to have more than a few game screens. The technical trick I pioneered for that game – using an 8-bit polynomial counter to define each screen – provided for more than 200 screens of game play.

Finally, in gaming, each sequel has to be bigger and better than the last. So when you start with an original game that has so much more in it than other games, each sequel is forced to be that much better.

Pitfall! represented a big leap in gameplay. And each sequel had to be even better, so the whole body of work tended to stay ahead of the curve, keeping new audiences happy while remaining true to the spirit of the original.

RG: Looking back over your career, what game are you most proud of and why?

DC: I recently completed my 68th published game, and each one has something about it that I consider special. Sometimes the part that makes me proud is a unique game play feature, and sometimes it is an extremely esoteric programming technique that might take several pages of explanation. To list a few:

Most obscure display technique: Atari 2600 *Dragster* for the moving 48-bit dragster kernel.

Best overall use of the Atari 2600 hardware: *Grand Prix* for the size and colour of the car, and the edge treatment of the disappearing cars.

Image compression/decompression: C64 *Transformers*, for run-time rendering of two-dimensional textured parts for transformation animations.

Digitised speech player: C64 *Transformers* again, for custom disk driver pulling real-time audio data from the flip side of the disk.

Best computer opponent: *Candystand Billiards*, computing bank shots through the use of phantom pocket projections.

Screen data generation: *Pitfall!* 8-bit reversable polynomial counter.

> “If my name is on a game, you can be sure that I wrote the majority of the code”

RG: Are you still in touch with your former Activision co-founders?

DC: We will run into each other occasionally, particularly at classic gaming events. But despite the fact that we all still live in the Bay Area, it is a big place and we have spread out pretty far.

» [C64] Solving the problem of a short turnaround, this and the driving section of *Ghostbusters* were taken from a game Activision already had in production titled *Car Wars*.



*NUMBER CRUNCHING

David's first game was *Outlaw*, it was released in **1977**.

Pitfall! featured over **200** screens of gameplay.

Pitfall! quickly became one of the best-selling Atari 2600 games ever, with over **4** million copies of the game sold on the console alone.

David has recently completed his **68th** published game.

A Boy And His Blob featured **14** different flavoured jellybeans.

The concept behind *Pitfall!* took David around **10** minutes to think up, but it took him around **1,000** hours of programming to complete it.

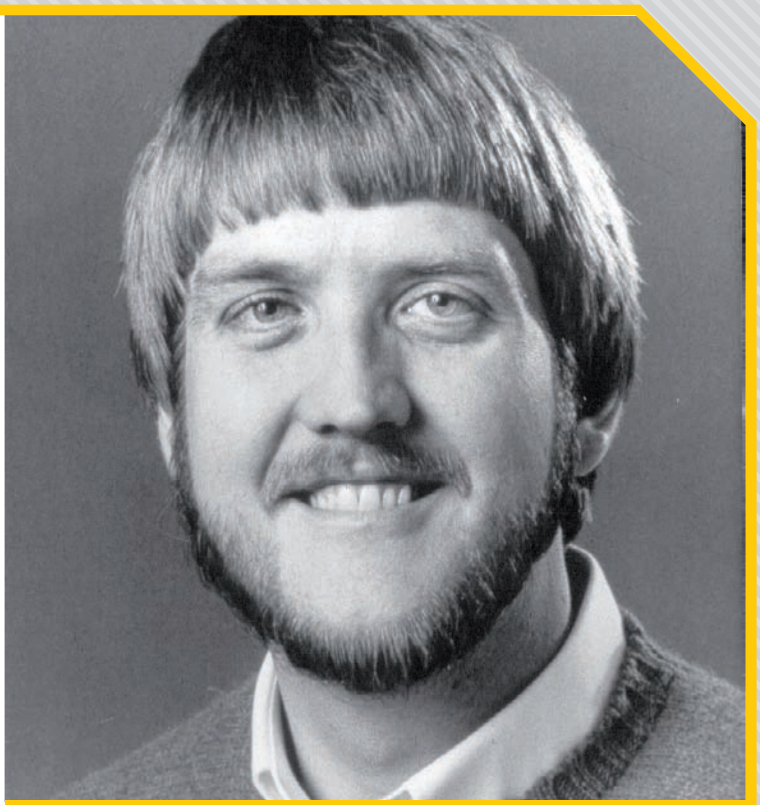
For most of David's adult life he played tennis with an national tennis rating of **5.0**. Very few reach this level, and the best rating you can achieve is **7.0**.

There are **7** games in the *Pitfall!* series, including an arcade version of *Pitfall II* developed by Sega. David has only worked on **3** *Pitfall!* titles.

RG: Tell us a little about the forming of Absolute Entertainment; why did it come about?

DC: When the videogame business crashed in 1983, Garry Kitchen and his co-workers in Activision's eastern design centre spun off to form Imagineering Inc. to do contract game development. They developed the *Simpsons* games for Acclaim, and became the largest North American developer for Nintendo NES games.

After a few years of success as developers they decided to also publish games, creating Absolute Entertainment as a brand. Garry contacted me to help to create and expand a line of games for Absolute, and before long I joined the company full time and he and I were working together again.

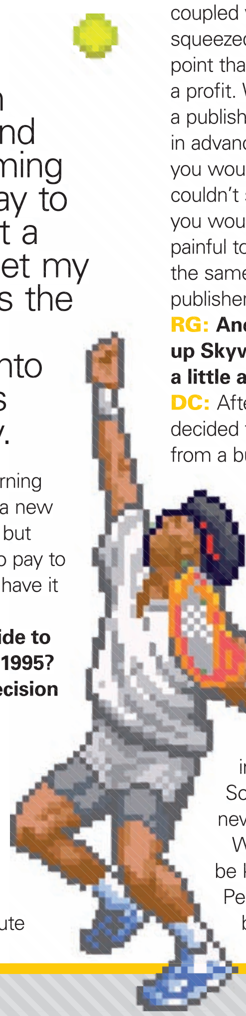


» Despite leaving Activision in 1986, David still occasionally sees the other co-founders.

RG: How much involvement did you have with the games? Were you still coding at the time?

DC: If my name is on a game, you can be sure that I wrote the majority of the code in the game. I find that programming is the best way to guarantee that a game will meet my standards. It is the program that breathes life into the characters and gameplay.

That often means learning a new game system or a new programming language, but that is the price I have to pay to keep control. I wouldn't have it any other way.



RG: Why did you decide to close the company in 1995? And how difficult a decision was that?

DC: The videogame business runs in cycles. I have been in the business for 33 years, and over that time there have been a number of boom and bust periods. Absolute ran into a bad patch in the business and couldn't sustain operations. The cost of ROM cartridges from Japan, coupled with heavy-handed retailers squeezed game publishers to the point that they could no longer make a profit. With ROM cartridge games, a publisher had to order goods far in advance. If you ordered too many you would be stuck with games you couldn't sell. If you ordered too few you would be giving up profits. It was painful to close down Absolute, but the same was happening to small publishers all around the world.

RG: And it was then that you set up Skyworks Technologies. Tell us a little about it…

DC: After Absolute, Garry and I decided that we would stay away from a business that had inventory risk. We decided to treat the internet as a game platform, and we began designing games that could be played in a browser. In 1995, people had not yet become comfortable buying anything online – if you remember, people were terrified that their credit card information would be stolen. So we had to come up with a new business model.

We created what would later be known as Advergaming. People weren't shopping online, but they were browsing, and companies were trying to get the attention of the casual internet user. There is no better way to do that than to give people free games to play. So we developed games and licensed them to companies to put on their web sites. It made for a three-way partnership: we got paid for making games, people got to play games for free and advertisers could draw people to their web sites. It worked a lot like the early days of commercial television with sponsored shows.

RG: Tell us about Candystand…

DC: The Candystand was Advergaming applied to a dedicated gaming site. The Lifesavers Candy Company spent a lot of money on brand promotion. For the Candystand we took a small percentage of their promotions budget and built a place to play games. Lifesavers brands would sponsor the games as if they were outside advertisers. Skyworks provided dozens of brand-new games that could only be played on the site, generating as many as 80 million game plays per month.

The Candystand delivered the lowest cost per brand impression of any internet advertising method. In other words it was the most successful form of internet advertising in that decade.

RG: And your collaboration with ESPN… how did that come about?

DC: A number of times over the years, Skyworks worked with ESPN to provide games and promotions.

Eventually ESPN decided to hand over the reins of its gaming site. We created a special ESPN game site similar to the Candystand. But in this case they sold advertising space to other companies. This was a moderately successful arrangement, only limited by the learning curve of their salespeople who could never quite understand the difference between sponsorship and advertising.

RG: You later moved into the iPhone market. What do you think of the iPhone as a gaming device?

DC: I love the iPhone as a gaming device. I love the iPad even more. For years we have waited for the cell phone that could play games, and the iPhone is the first real candidate. But you don't need me to tell you that – just compare the number of games available for the iPhone to any other handheld device.

RG: So why did you set up AppStar Games?

DC: Garry and I sold Skyworks in 2007, but we agreed to continue to work with the company for a period of time. In October of 2009 we parted company.

I have been designing games since 1977, so it is only natural that I will continue to do so. At AppStar Games we plan to publish games for the iPhone, iPad and various other handheld devices.

RG: Are you happiest managing companies or simply programming?

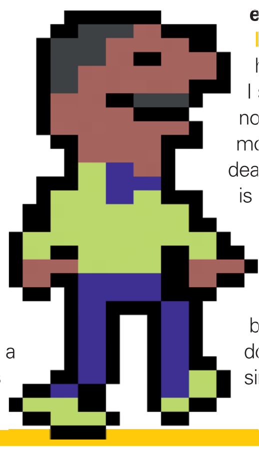
DC: I still program games every day. The only distinction I might make is that I am not just a game programmer. We use the term 'game designer' to describe a programmer who also figures out how to put the fun into the game. That is what I do.

I rely on other experts – artists, animators, composers, sound effects specialists etc, but what I do is to take the work of these others and breathe life into them. I create a complete world in which they have an existence of their own, and it is this world into which the player is allowed a glimpse.

RG: Aside from your excellent Atari Magic apps, what else can we look forward to?

DC: I developed the Atari Magic apps just to document some of the more obscure tricks that were needed to make a game for the Atari 2600. It wasn't much more than a labour of love. I haven't had time to do more in that series, however, because we got busy developing *The Iron Horse* for the iPad and iPhone.

The *Iron Horse* is a very simple game – by design. At a recent conference I spoke to a number of contemporary game designers. One told me that "I can design a giant story game with hundreds of thing to do and see. But it is really hard to make a simple game that is just fun to play." Figuring out something that is simple to do and yet still fun is what Garry and I do best. That is embodied in *The Iron Horse*. At first blush you will think of it as too simple to be interesting. But a few minutes into the game you might be surprised.



As one reviewer put it, "When I sit down to play a game or two, it becomes nine or ten. It's just very easy to pick up and play, very intuitive. I never once played it for more than five to ten minutes at a time, but it's always one of the first games I'd play when sitting down with the iPad with intent to do something else."

RG: Where do you see the games industry in ten years?

DC: Ten years is too far for my crystal ball to see. But the biggest thing in the past few years is direct-to-consumer sales. It is so easy to buy a game from the App Store that it is easy to forget that you used to drive to Toys R Us or the game specialty shop in the mall. Now you can own a game in seconds.

But as the number of game offerings go from hundreds of thousands to millions, new and better ways to identify good games will have to be created. I am anxious to see how that question will be answered.

> "[Atari] made a mistake – one that is repeated over and over in every business"

RG: You've been working with Garry Kitchen for many years now. What's he like?

DC: Garry is a rare type – he's an entrepreneur businessman who can still roll up his sleeves after all of these years and write game code. Like me he realises that the best way to achieve a vision is to program the computer yourself.

He is also the most honest and responsible person I have met in business. If you sit down to make a deal with Garry, his goal is to make sure that both parties end up with a deal that makes sense for their respective businesses. I couldn't have a better business partner.

RG: How do you find the iPhone to program on compared to earlier systems?

DC: All game systems have their little quirks, and I suppose the iPhone is no different. But one of the most important issues when dealing with a game console is performance. How fast will my game operate on the device? The iPhone performance is great. And more importantly, because the iPhone doesn't run multiple apps simultaneously, a game designer can count on the same performance for every player, every time. When you hear complaints that the iPhone doesn't run multiple apps, consider what will happen on those devices with multiple programs vying for one CPU.

RG: What do you think of the current generation of videogames?

DC: There are some great console games on the market. There are games that required dozens of talented people working many years to complete. Those games are not my cup of tea, either making or playing, but as a player you should enjoy them. A lot of things have to come together to make them possible, and unless you support them with your purchasing dollars you won't get to see the next generation of that game.

RG: Do you own any current-generation consoles and, if so, what are your favourites?

DC: Unfortunately I don't have much time to play games. I suppose that seems funny since playing games led to my career in making games. But making a game takes so many hundreds of hours that there just doesn't seem to be much time.

RG: How has the industry changed since you started, and do you think it has changed for the better?

DC: As I have said, the biggest change in the industry has been direct-to-consumer sales of games. Large studio games will still be funded by one of the larger publishers like Activision, but direct sales make it possible for many smaller developers to create games and get them to market.

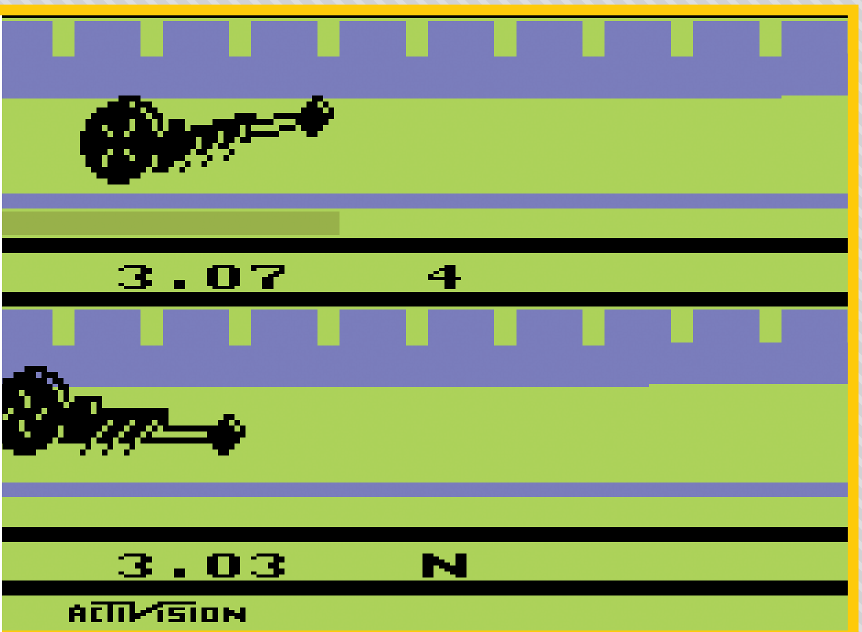
This can be a good thing for some, but it actually causes other problems. One of the biggest problems is the lower price points for games. A teenager making a game in his bedroom might be happy to make a few hundred dollars on a game, so he has no problem offering the game at 99 cents (I have read of guys who were perfectly happy that they were able to buy a new Mac on the proceeds of a game). But professional game studios have to pay half-a-dozen professionals, pay the rent, utilities and health insurance for two dozen employees. That is hard to do if the expectation is that a game is only worth 99 cents.

When I spend thousands of hours making a game, including tens of thousands of dollars of art and sound development, I still have to sell the game for only a dollar or two. Thanks to thousands of teenagers making games at home, that is what the market has come to expect. Once you play a game made by a professional design team, you can certainly see the difference. But until you do, it is hard to get noticed.

RG: Before we go, we have to ask: how good are you at tennis?

DC: For most of my adult life I played tennis with an NTRP (National Tennis Rating Program) rating of 5.0 (this is a standardized scale from 1.0 for beginner to 7.0 for Roger Federer). A very small percentage of the millions of tennis players achieve a rating of 5.0 or better. Tennis has been a lifelong passion, and it helped to make *Amazing Tennis* into a realistic simulation of the game (*Amazing Tennis* was so named for the amazing 3D parallax display never before seen on the SNES).

I still play tennis in tournament and league competition, but due to age and injuries I no longer play at the 5.0 level.



» [A2600] *Dragster* was an early Activision title and served as a warning shot of the great things to come.



» [iPad] David's latest game is *Iron Horse*, an addictive game designed for the iPad.



» [SNES] David loves tennis, and *Amazing Tennis* is a great testament to his passion for the sport.

YOU ASK THE QUESTIONS

We were inundated with questions for David Crane. He managed to answer a good selection of them…

Who did that voice sample in the *Ghostbusters* game?
That is a good question – and one that I don't clearly remember. I had written an audio digitiser and driver for the C64. The actual voice sample would have come from Russell Lieblich, who sadly passed away in 2005. Russell provided music and sound effects for many of Activision's games in that period of time. I'm sure he would have first tried to use the voices from the movie theme song. But it is possible that he was unable to isolate that sample from the underlying theme music, which would have made the sample unusable. If that happened he would have probably set up a microphone and borrowed people in the company. But I don't know for certain, and I am sorry to say that we can no longer ask him.

Have you ever been tempted to make *Pitfall 3*?
Pitfall (the license) remained the property of Activision after I left in 1987. So I never thought much about resurrecting Pitfall Harry after my departure. But I do like side-view adventures, and I have done a number of games in the genre since then as online games.

Do you still have the personalised license plate "Pitfall"? If so, how much to buy it from you?
I still use that license plate since I put it on my car in 1982. I had an old 280Z that was due to be replaced, and I was on vacation thinking about a new car and what custom license plate I might like. There was no way to get "Activision" to look good with only seven letters, and that was a disappointment. When it struck me that Pitfall would fit perfectly, I cut my vacation short to get to the DMV.

As for buying it, I would gladly consider any seven-figure offer.

Have you ever finished a project and immediately thought of a dozen ways to improve it?
Every game project ends because it hits a limit, and that limit is rarely a lack of ideas. In the early days we ran up against the ROM limit before any other. As technology improved a project ran out of time or budget before running out of memory. But in either case the key to videogame design is to get as much playability into a game within the available limits.

There has never been a game that couldn't have been made better with more time, more budget or more memory.



What non-Activision Atari 2600 game impressed you the most?
While still at Atari, Rob Fulop did a great job on the 2600 version of *Missile Command*. Making a 2600 version of an established arcade game is one of the toughest challenges in our field, and that was very well done.

A second choice would also be a Rob Fulop game: *Demon Attack*. There wasn't a lot to the game graphically, but that could be said of most 2600 games. Rob tweaked the game very well, keeping the game compelling as it ramped up over time.

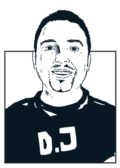
What was/is your biggest programming regret and why?
Looking back I wish that *Little Computer People* had been a commercial success. While it was a huge critical success, there was so much programming in the game that it cost more to produce than it made at retail. We had dozens of ideas for follow-up products, but if those ideas were going to lose money the company couldn't afford to produce them. I regret that we were unable to follow those ideas to see what might have become of the first large-scale simulated life form on a computer.



They Sold A Million

YOU JUST NEEDED FOUR REASONS TO BUY IT

RETROREVIVAL



» SPECTRUM
» OCEAN
» 1985

Nowadays, compilations are a rarity, usually only appearing in the name of a good cause or on digital outlets. In the Eighties, however, they were big business and a fantastic way of stretching your pocket money.

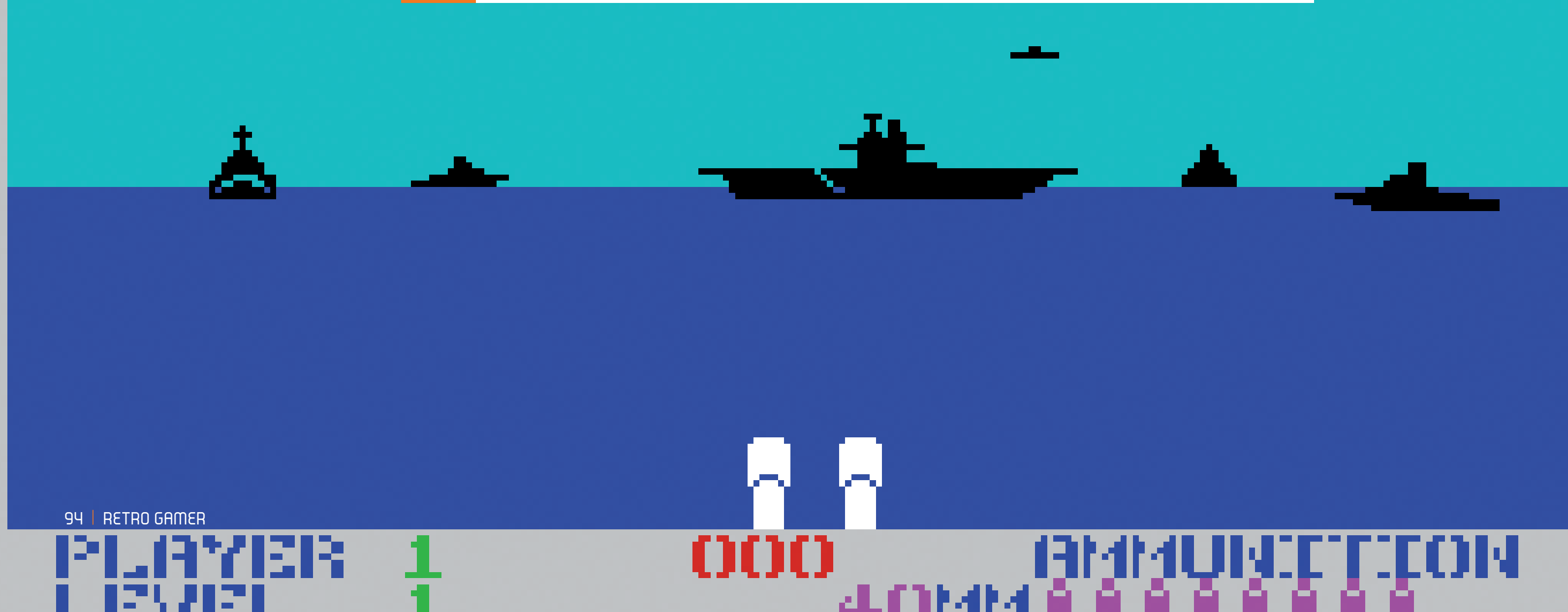


They Sold A Million might not have represented the best value compared to some of its peers – it only featured four titles – but it was nevertheless a must-have compendium that every Spectrum owner desired in their collection. An impressive collaboration between four of the UK's best software houses – US Gold, Ultimate: Play the Game, Software Projects and Ocean – *They Sold A Million* gets its name from the combined sales of all four games.

Aside from the fact that the compilation features games from various publishers, *They Sold A Million* is also unusual because different versions exist for the Spectrum, Commodore 64 and Amstrad CPC. The Spectrum version, which we've featured here, contains *Daley Thompson's Decathlon*, *Jet Set Willy*, *Beach-Head* and the wonderful *Sabre Wulf*. C64 owners weren't quite as fortunate, as they received *The Staff Of Karnath* in lieu of *Sabre Wulf*, a good game, but not a patch on Ultimate's contribution. CPC owners also had to go without *Sabre Wulf*, although they got the equally good *Atic Atac*. Interestingly, both *Atic Atac* and *Jet Set Willy* were converted to the CPC specifically for the compilation.

The four games meant that all bases were covered as far as variety was concerned, and while the presentation was fairly simplistic, it remained a bargain, particularly when you consider that the games had been released a year earlier for a combined £31.

Other publishers released compilations with far more on them, but the quality was rarely up to the same standard. Nevertheless, four gems for under a tenner remains a bargain and no mistake.




The Bathroom
Items collected 000 Time 7:00am

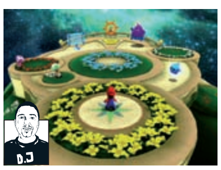


>> SUPER MARIO GALAXY 2

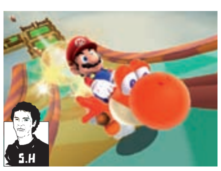


>> This month we've been utterly addicted to the brilliance of Super Mario Galaxy 2, been in awe of the wonderful Joe Danger, and even found some time to look at some cool iPad games. Fans of retro gaming have never had it so good

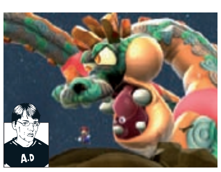
* PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN
Super Mario Galaxy 2
Quite simply the finest platformer ever made. It's pretty damned impressive.



STUART
Super Mario Galaxy 2
We've been spoiled with some great releases this month but *Mario Galaxy 2* takes the trophy.



ASHLEY
Super Mario Galaxy 2
I'm still miles off that 242nd star. But, with such quality, there's no rush.



NINTENDO RAISES THE PLATFORMING BAR TO ASTRONOMICAL LEVELS

INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** WII
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £39.99
- » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **PLAYERS:** 1

BRIEF HISTORY

» Everyone's favourite plumber started off as a carpenter and was known as Jumpman. After making his debut in *Donkey Kong* he has become gaming's most recognisable character and has appeared in everything from excellent platformers like the *Super Mario Bros* series to spin-offs like *Mario Tennis* and *Super Smash Bros Brawl*.

* WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
SUPER MARIO WORLD (SNES)



▽ SOMETHING NEW
SUPER MARIO GALAXY (WII)



Super Mario Galaxy 2



Due to annoying deadlines it's entirely possible that you've already played, or even completed, this magnificent game. If you have already played it then sit safe in the knowledge that you've been able to see a master at the height of his career. If you haven't discovered it yet, we suggest that you do everything possible to rectify this oversight; even if it means shelling out on an actual Wii in order to play it.

Super Mario Galaxy 2 is quite simply the finest platformer ever made. Yes, it's a ridiculously bold statement, particularly when you consider what other titles are available after three decades of platforming, but it is easily one of the most enchanting gaming experiences around. Indeed, everything about *Super Mario Galaxy 2* feels like perfection in a bottle. The graphics are simply sensational and show just what's possible on Nintendo's console, while the remixed tunes and instantly recognisable effects make you right at home.

Controls are also a joy, thanks to a stunningly good camera that never ever puts a foot wrong and the fact that Nintendo has been honing its 3D platforming controls for the past 14 years. Mario and Yoshi move around with incredible precision, which enables you to



» [Wii] Level design throughout Mario's new adventure is incredible.





GO DEEPER

The facts behind Super Mario Galaxy 2

>> *Super Mario Galaxy*'s sequel started off life as an extension, as opposed to a direct sequel, with a development time of a year

>> *Super Mario Galaxy 2* performed exceptionally well in Japan, selling over 350,000 units in its first week on sale





tackle every amazing stage that Nintendo constantly throws at you.

And what levels they are. While it's easy to suggest that the fragmented worlds that make up *Super Mario Galaxy 2* are a testament to bad level design, this is far from the case. Every stage is a masterpiece in design, with meticulously crafted worlds that are not only incredibly inventive, but, amazingly, manage to outdo those of previous *Mario* games. Packed with variety and introducing plenty of new suits for Mario that give him every imaginable ability, from creating clouds to turning into a massive Slinky, each of them has not only been finely honed but is also integrated perfectly into the levels themselves.

These new abilities are slowly introduced as the game unfolds, but, like the difficulty, they are handled flawlessly, allowing you just enough time to familiarise yourself with one new item before moving on to the next. Even Yoshi – who feels a world away from his outing in *Super Mario Sunshine* – has picked up new abilities, and it's the experimentation between the two that really adds greatly to the game's charm.

We're always loathe to talk about how games can be magical, or make your face break out into a huge grin, as it feels clichéd and hackneyed, but it's so true for Mario's latest adventure. One minute you'll be laughing at his on-screen antics; the next you'll be holding your breath as you witness the next galaxy. The real beauty, however, is that the ride just keeps getting better, and just when you think you've seen everything that Nintendo has to offer, it throws yet more brilliance at you.

Mario Galaxy 2 may be a sequel, but it's a sequel that manages to improve on both the original and the genre itself in every possible way.



OPINION

If you're looking for a perspective that contradicts Darran's then you won't get it from me. *Super Mario Galaxy 2* is one of the most expertly developed games of all time, fine-tuned to make sure you're having fun at every possible second.

Ashley Day

In A Nutshell

Nintendo has been crafting the platformer for three decades now and *Super Mario Galaxy 2* is the magnificent result of all the hard work. A phenomenal game that every gamer needs to experience.

>> Scores

Presentation	98%
Graphics	98%
Sound	92%
Playability	100%
Addictivity	99%
Overall	**100%**

VIRTUAL ROUND-UP

>> There's no better medium to find all your favourite retro games than the various download services. Here are this month's new additions

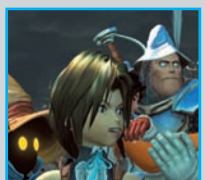
VIRTUAL CONSOLE



Mario Tennis
» **System:** N64
» **Points:** 1,000
» **Rating:** ★★★★★
» It's been a while since we've had a new N64 title on the VC, but this offering is more than welcome. *Mario Tennis* is not only a great arcade representation of the sport, but is absolutely jam-packed with variety and things to unlock. Highly recommended and great fun in multiplayer.

Final Fantasy II
» **System:** NES
» **Points:** 600
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆

PLAYSTATION NETWORK



Final Fantasy IX
» **System:** PlayStation
» **Points:** £7.99
» **Rating:** ★★★★★
» Many felt that the ninth *Final Fantasy* wasn't a patch on the previous two PlayStation instalments. This is something of a shame, because it not only looks gorgeous, with a design heavily styled on the earlier games, but also features a superior story to its peers that can really tug at the heart strings. Another essential PSN download.

Oddworld: Abe's Exoddus
» **System:** PlayStation
» **Price:** £3.99
» **Rating:** ★★★★☆

Kurushi Final
» **System:** PlayStation
» **Price:** £3.99
» **Rating:** ★★★★☆

Disney/Pixar Toy Story 2
» **System:** PlayStation
» **Price:** £5.19
» **Rating:** ★★☆☆☆

GAME ROOM

* All games are 240 Points

Frog Bog
» **System:** Intellivision
» **Rating:** ★★☆☆☆



Missile Command
» **System:** Arcade
» **Rating:** ★★★★★
» Yes, the 360's pad is no match for a trackball, but there's no denying that *Missile Command* remains a fantastic blaster. Fast and furious and also requiring a fair amount of strategy, it's a truly excellent shooter and an essential addition to any virtual arcade.

Mr Goemon
» **System:** Arcade
» **Rating:** ★★☆☆☆

Skiing
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆

Video Pinball
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★★☆☆☆

Baseball
» **System:** Intellivision
» **Rating:** ★☆☆☆☆

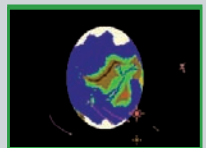
Circus Atari
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆

River Raid II
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★★★★☆

Sky Jinks
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆

Video Hustler
» **System:** Arcade
» **Rating:** ★☆☆☆☆

Air-Sea Battle
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★★☆☆☆



Liberator
» **System:** Arcade
» **Rating:** ★★★★★
» We'll admit to never having played *Liberator* before and now we're kicking ourselves, as it's really great. While not quite as simplistic as predecessor *Missile Command*, it remains an excellent blaster. Amazingly, it was released just a year later.

Chopper Command
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★★☆☆☆

Konami's Ping Pong
» **System:** Arcade
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆

Motocross
» **System:** Intellivision
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆

Black Widow
» **System:** Arcade
» **Rating:** ★★★★☆

Casino
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★☆☆☆☆

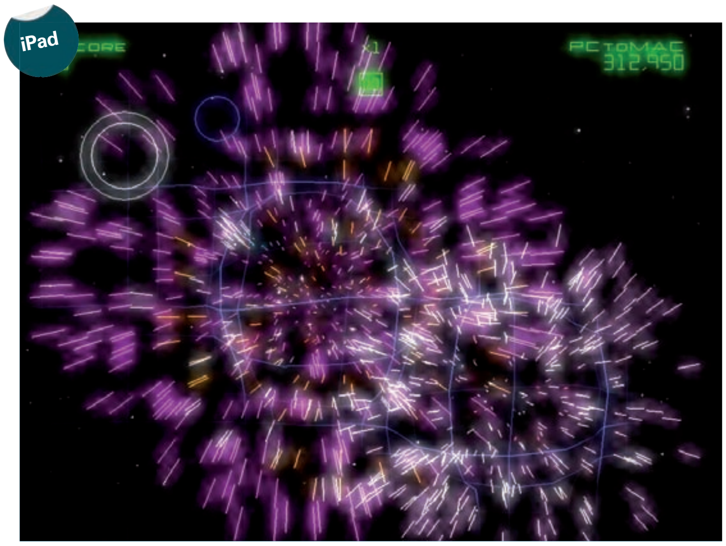
Laser Blast
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★★☆☆☆

Triple Action
» **System:** Intellivision
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆



H.E.R.O.
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★★★★★
» While a huge number of 2600 and Intellivision titles are rather poor, there are still plenty of gems to be found. This wonderful effort from John Van Ryzin is a wonderfully slick experience, despite the fact that it's now 26 years old. A clever blaster that all need to own.

iPad



» [iPad] Sooner or later you're going to endure a spectacular-looking death.

Geometry Wars Touch

YOU'VE GOT THE TOUCH!

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** IPAD » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** IPHONE/IPOD TOUCH » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £5.99 » **PUBLISHER:** ACTIVISION » **DEVELOPER:** DOUBLESIX GAMES » **PLAYERS:** 1

S.H

After an inauspicious beginning in *Project Gotham Racing 2*, Stephen Cakebread's *Geometry Wars* franchise has turned into one of the most successful twin-stick shooters of all time. The latest version to appear is an enhanced version of *Geometry Wars 2: Retro Evolved*, and aside from one annoying oversight that affects the iPad version, it's another incredibly robust shooter.

As with the brilliant Xbox Live Arcade game, *Geometry Wars Touch* consists of the original six gameplay modes – Deadline, King, Evolved, Pacifism, Waves and Sequence – and the all new Titans mode, exclusive to Apple's machine. It also employs a similar unlocking method, meaning you have to put a fair amount of time into each mode before you can access them all.

Fortunately the games themselves remain excellent, with Pacifism, King and Deadline being our particular favourites. The new mode Titan isn't quite up to the same standards, but is a solid enough addition, being *Geometry Wars*' own take on *Asteroids*. Add in online leaderboards and surprisingly solid controls – the iPad's screen is effectively cut in half with the left controlling movement and the right firing – and this is easily worth the £6 asking price.

In fact, the only thing that stops this iPad version of *Geometry Wars* scoring anywhere near its Xbox Live Arcade sibling is the silly placement of the bomb bottom, which is annoyingly hard to reach with your thumbs. Play it on an iPhone, though, and everything is golden.

OPINION

D.J

While the strange positioning of the smart bomb is utterly insane – it was programmed on an iPhone and not an iPad – there's no denying that *Geometry Wars Touch* remains a great addition to the series. An exciting little blaster that does the franchise proud.

Darran Jones

>> Scores

Presentation	80%
Graphics	91%
Sound	90%
Playability	82%
Addictivity	86%

Overall 83%

» [PSP] Find the mysterious island and you can go hunting for monsters, *Metal Gear* style.





OPINION

S.H

There's just so much for fans to sink their teeth into. I loved the scale of the game, the co-op mode and the longevity and surprises it repeatedly offers. This is an impressive and must-own title for Sony's handheld and stands shoulders with the best episodes in the series.

Stuart Hunt

PS3



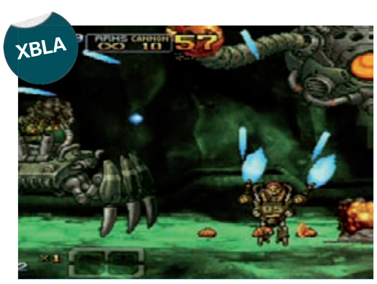
ModNation Racers

» **SYSTEM:** PS3
» **PRICE:** £39.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1-12

>> While *ModNation Racers* is a brand new Sony-exclusive IP, its ability to allow anyone to easily create some of the best retro racing tracks of all time can't be ignored. Far easier to use and create with than *LittleBigPlanet* and with plenty of retro-themed tracks already available online, it's a fun little kart racer that's only really let down by some cheap AI and really lengthy loading times.

>> Score **85%**

XBLA



Metal Slug XX

» **SYSTEM:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE
» **PRICE:** 1,200 POINTS » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

>> While the core *Metal Slug* gameplay itself is perfectly acceptable, this is a truly appalling port that does the venerable franchise and SNK Playmore no favours at all. The visuals are atrocious thanks to the horrendous filter that has been used, while 16:9 mode simply stretches the image and makes it even uglier. A fun game gets a lazy port, which means you should avoid this at all costs.

>> Score **60%**





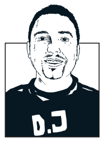
» [PSP] Fans will be pleased to know that sneaking around is still a big part of *Peace Walker.*

PSP

Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker

SNAKE'S BEST HANDHELD ADVENTURE

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PSP » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW » **PRICE:** £29.99 » **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
» **DEVELOPER:** KOJIMA PRODUCTIONS » **PLAYERS:** 1-4



After once stating that a true *Metal Gear* game would never be possible on the PSP, Kojima has proven himself to be a great big fibber by releasing one of the best games in the series on the machine.

Granted there are hardware issues that stop it from achieving true greatness, but in terms of sheer scope, this is an excellent addition to the series that builds on the groundwork of *Portable Ops* and takes it into fresh new exciting directions.

You still get lengthy cut-scenes, including some beautifully drawn ones that are punctuated by fun QTEs, but the bite-sized chapters now make this perfect for playing on the go. The vast majority of missions can be completed on your own or in groups of up to four players and the graphics are some of the best we've seen on Sony's portable system, while there are plenty of nods to earlier games in the franchise.

Taking inspiration from *Monster Hunter* – there's even a 'Hunter' control scheme and an island with monsters from the series to discover – *Peace Walker* features a similar emphasis on collecting and revisiting cleared stages in order to improve your skills. This is far from repetitive however, as stages are exceedingly well designed and far more streamlined that traditional *MGS* titles. There are also a huge number of additional missions to complete once the main game is completed. Add in the ability to recruit soldiers from the field, the way you can create new items and weapons, slowly build the original Outer Heaven and take part in numerous side missions and *Peace Walker* offers fantastic longevity and depth.

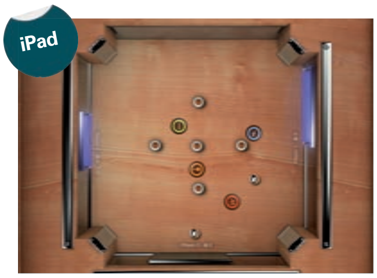
And yet, for all its brilliance, there are a number of issues that stop this from being the ultimate *MGS* experience. The most obvious is the actual controls. While Kojima has given you a choice of three different options and allows you to tweak them to the nth degree, they still let you down at key points, often leading to unneeded deaths. They're admittedly a huge improvement over the clunky controls of the *Portable Ops* games, but still cost *Peace Walker* greatly. Another issue we have is that many of the bosses you fight just aren't that memorable, lacking the impact of previous mayors in the series.

Fiddly controls aside, *Peace Walker* remains an essential addition to the series and proves that you can teach an old snake new tricks.

>> Scores

Presentation	85%
Graphics	88%
Sound	94%
Playability	90%
Addictivity	86%
Overall	**88%**

iPad



MultiPong

» **SYSTEM:** IPAD
» **PRICE:** £1.79 » **PLAYERS:** 1-4

>> Think of an interesting cross between air hockey, *Pong* and *Warlords* and you have one of the most addictive games currently available on Apple's iPad. Swish physics, a fun variety of power-ups and excellent precise controls make for an amazing multiplayer experience. It does lose a fair bit of its charm when you play it on your own however, but it remains an essential download.

>> Score 80%

PSN



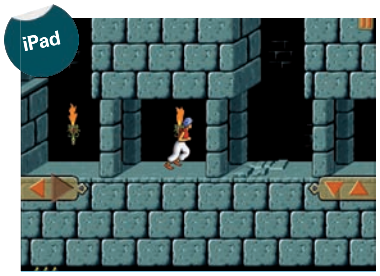
Söldner-X 2: Final Prototype

» **SYSTEM:** PSN
» **PRICE:** £9.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

>> While there are still some elements of the Euro shmups of old, *Söldner-X 2* is an improvement that outdoes the original in every area. Graphically stunning with a fantastic soundtrack, it scores points thanks to better-balanced weapons and a sensible – if rather easy – difficulty curve. It still lacks variety and inventiveness, but this is great stuff.

>> Score 78%

iPad



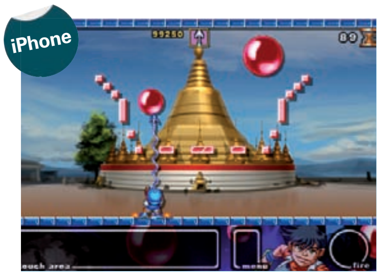
Prince Of Persia

» **SYSTEM:** IPAD/IPHONE/IPOD TOUCH
» **PRICE:** £0.59 » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> There's something immensely satisfying about playing Jordan Mechner's classic platformer on a new Apple product. Sadly, while it looks absolutely gorgeous on the iPad's screen, this version is let down by tiny on-screen controls that make controlling the Prince far trickier than it should be. The superb level design still shines through, and the gameplay remains satisfying, but this is far from perfect.

>> Score 65%

iPhone



Pang

» **SYSTEM:** IPHONE/IPOD TOUCH
» **PRICE:** £0.59 » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> We've always loved a bit of *Pang*, but this new version for Apple's iPhone is far more frustrating than the arcade original. The problem comes down to the tiny on-screen virtual pad that makes your character needlessly difficult to control. It's a real pity, because the conversion itself is otherwise super-slick and offers plenty of gameplay modes. It's just a shame it's so damned clunky to play.

>> Score 62%

>> JOE DANGER

PS3



» [PlayStation 3] The game has plenty of longevity – in fact it's possibly the best value PSN game out there.



» [PlayStation 3] By jumping while boosting your way around the track it's possible to rack up some silly high scores.

★ GO DEEPER

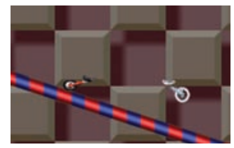
The facts behind Joe Danger

>> The similarities between Joe Danger and ExciteBike weren't lost on the developers as the game features a level that pays tribute to the Nintendo classic.

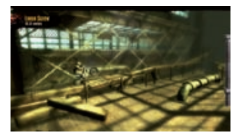
>> The record for the fastest motorcycle wheelie is held by Patrick Fürstenhoff.

★ WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
UNIRALLY (SNES)



▽ SOMETHING NEW
TRAILS HD (360)



DANGER IS HIS SECOND NAME

Joe Danger



The world of *Joe Danger* is one that any fan of the golden age of videogames will instantly appreciate. This Pixar-looking platformer/racer cleverly cribs from some of the best games from its genre, so don't be surprised if flashes of *Unirally, Excitebike* and *Kickstart II* suddenly hit you when the game's titular Elvis-suited daredevil takes to the air.

The main game comprises of a series of different tours that follow Joe on his comeback tour and beyond. Each tour contains a series of tracks and races that feature objectives that can be completed in any order. These range from collecting up all the blue stars that appear on a stage, hitting floating letters to spell out the word 'Danger' to simply winning races, hitting score targets and completing tracks within a strict time limit. This gives the game bags of replay value as you find yourself wanting to replay the tracks over and over until you've completed each objective. Even when the game's 100 per cent complete, it still has plenty more longevity thanks to a fun track editor that allows you to create and share tracks online.

INFORMATION

- **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PS3
- **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** £9.99
- **PUBLISHER:** HELLO GAMES
- **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **PLAYERS:** 1

BRIEF HISTORY

» *Joe Danger* was developed by indie outfit Hello Games. Despite the game's big-budget looks, the studio is surprisingly small – just a team of four guys. According to their website, the guys love retro games, Sega the Amstrad and *Robotron: 2048*, and between them have worked for Climax, Sumo Digital and Sega in the past.

Similar to titles like *Unirally* and *Pure, Joe Danger* employs a great risk and reward mechanic to its racing action. Performing stunts, tricks and aerobatics builds up a bar at the bottom of the screen, and when this is full Joe can then use it to give himself a handy speed boost to make some of the trickier jumps and come within some of the more punishing time limits.

If we have one warning to give about the game (and this isn't really a criticism as such) it's that progression and success in the game does seem to be heavily reliant on trial and error, so if that type of game isn't your cup of tea then you might find yourself getting a little frustrated with some of the latter sections of the game. This is just a small quibble though, and one that we suspect many will be happy to overlook – especially as there is a convenient insta-reset button that plonks Joe straight back at the starting line in a blink of an eye.

In summing up, *Joe Danger* is a must-own PSN title, and is so wonderfully polished throughout we'd still be recommending you snap it up even if it was a full-price title.

OPINION



I adore Joe's first outing and hope he gets to have more. Hello Games has effortlessly mixed a number of classic games together to create a wonderful title that's full of variety and humour. If you love the likes of *Kickstart, Trials HD* and *Excitebike* then you need *Joe Danger.*

Darran Jones

In a nutshell

It's great fun, good-looking and highly addictive with tons of value. We actually wrote a sonnet about *Joe Danger* but felt printing it would be taking our love for the game a little too far. True fact.

>> Scores

Presentation	90%
Graphics	85%
Sound	80%
Playability	88%
Addictivity	90%
Overall	**90%**

HOMEBREW

>> The scene's latest news and reviews



I wasn't entirely sure about the review on this page, because covering games a quarter of a century old isn't what I usually do, but playing them reminded me of my own early programming experiences – the ones that, ultimately, led to me writing for Retro Gamer – and I'm hoping that at least some of our readers, the ones who dabbled in programming, can enjoy a similar nostalgia by proxy

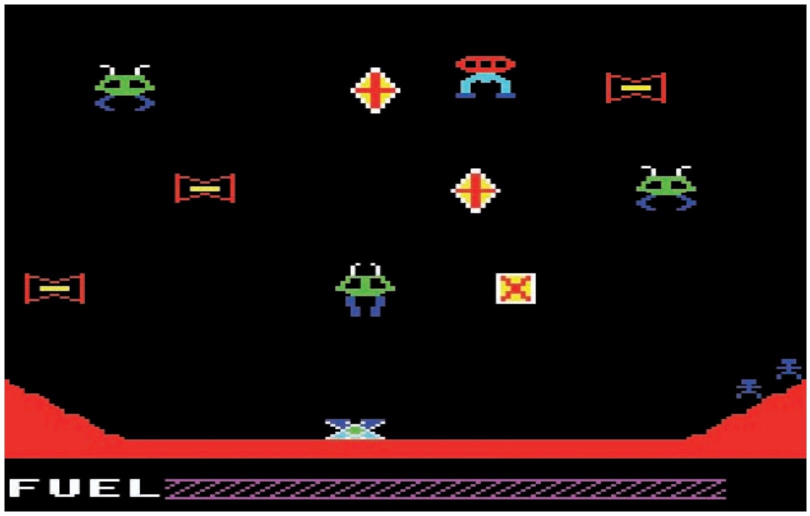
MINION BBC COLLECTION

DIGITAL ARCHAEOLOGY – WHERE'S LARA CROFT, THEN?





» [BBC] Just don't insert coins into the disk drive.



» [BBC] Totally cosmic, man.



» **FORMAT:** BBC MICRO
» **DEVELOPED BY:** MINION
» **LINK:** KIKSTART.EU/MINION
» **RELEASE DATE:** 2010
» **PRICE:** FREE
» **REVIEWED BY:** JASON KELK

Before we start, a little explanation is probably required. Minion, one of the regulars at Retro Remakes, has been programming games for decades, and some of the earliest examples of his work, produced for the BBC Micro when he was a mere teenager, have been languishing on battered cassette tapes since the mid-Eighties. But after a Herculean struggle, five games have been converted into emulator images and, after donning some slightly rose-tinted spectacles, we're going to take a look at them.

To begin with, we've got *Cosmic Lander*, and it's pretty much a clone of the arcade title *Moon Lander*. The player's craft pops up high above the planet surface and must be directed through the lanes of cosmic traffic to a safe landing, then turned around and flown back to the stratosphere. The controls are a little sluggish and can be acutely annoying considering the precision of the collisions, but it's not bad considering the age.

As we go on, things get worse on the copyright infringement front because, while *Cosmic Lander* was a clone in all but name, *Burger Time* is truly shameless. For anyone not familiar with the original, the player's presumably miniaturised chef must create burgers by pushing the ingredients off shelves, causing them to cascade down into the receptacles at the bottom of the screen. The controls are again languid, but this would have been the best of the bunch without the issue that causes an error message to appear just after starting the second level.

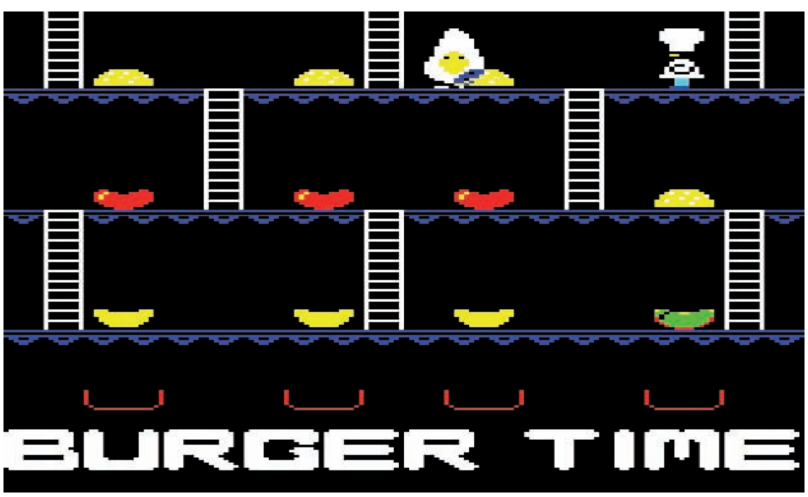
Ms Pac-Man is a somewhat rudimentary copy of the original that doesn't really manage to be more than a simple maze game. The important elements are all present, but the game just doesn't play like the original, the pace is slow, and the ghosts are as daft as brushes, not really patrolling when they can't see anything to chase and sometimes wandering around one on top of the other or getting stuck.

The only title that isn't action-oriented is *Mega Fruit*, an agreeable three-reel fruit machine simulator with hold and nudge features and the option to gamble winnings. Despite being quite sparse graphically and occasionally a little confusing when entering nudge mode, it's surprisingly engrossing, if short-lived.

And finally, there's *Kung-Fu Kid*, which is probably the best of the bunch and another coin-op clone, this time of *Kung-Fu Master*. Guide the kid safely through the horizontally scrolling levels, kicking and punching assailants and ducking under spinning shurikens, all because the girl needs saving.

As individual titles, these are probably best described as below average, but considered as a compilation they fare a little better. They're all playable, at least in short bursts, and *Mega Fruit* and *Kung-Fu Kid* in particular can sneakily steal an unexpected half an hour from unwary players. It's just a shame about the bug in *Burger Time*; hopefully somebody will see fit to make repairs if it hasn't happened before this goes to print.

62%



» [BBC] Is anyone else feeling hungry?

NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at:
retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

OLTICRUN

REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

» **FORMAT:** COMMODORE 16 » **DEVELOPER:** ROEPIPI
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/OLTICRUN » **PRICE:** FREE

Subtitled as "the case of the ever-running agent", *Olticrun* is an action-adventure starring poor Oltik, a covert operative on a clichéd mission to save the world. But, due to having one of those bizarre afflictions that seem to plague characters in game worlds, he just can't stop moving, so anything he needs to do, such as plant a bomb, move laser-reflecting mirrors or even cross the room to reach a table, all has to be done without stopping for breath or bumping into the potentially fatal walls.

This isn't a huge production number like the excellent *Adventures In Time* was last month, and the controls are a little sluggish, but it still manages to be quite amusing to play through. The action is assembled from a series of single-screen or scrolling mini-games, and the story itself delivered through static screens with text recounting the phone conversations that Agent Oltik has with his superior, all of which are lovingly rendered with ASCII characters.

71%





» [C16] Shut up and drive.

EVIL MAGICIAN'S RETURN

REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

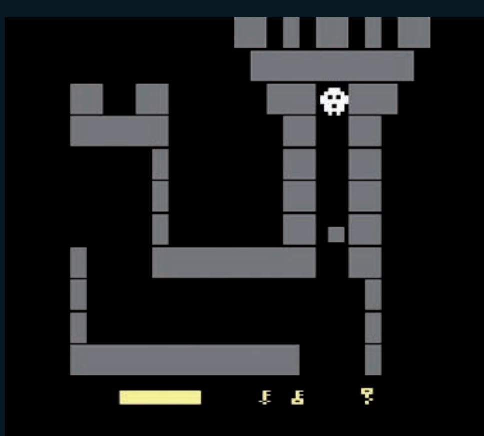
» **FORMAT:** ATARI 2600 » **DEVELOPER:** TODD HOLCOMB
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/EMR » **PRICE:** FREE

At the end of Atari's classic 2600 game *Adventure*, the minions of the evil magician had been defeated, the fabulous enchanted chalice recovered, and peace returned to the land. But despite being slapped down fair and square, this particular evil magician doesn't give up that easily. He and his apprentice have nicked the magic cup for a second time and, rather than delegate the job to dragons, they're planning to guard it in person.

So once more the square-jawed – well, square everything really – adventurer must navigate the maze-like grounds around the castle, arm himself, find keys to unlock other locations and, ultimately, grab the enchanted chalice, all while avoiding the baddies – at least he's got a backpack to keep collected objects in this time! If the easiest of the three difficulty settings is selected, our chunky protagonist's adventure will be quite short but quite eventful, and levels two and three should offer up more of a challenge to the more hardened *Adventure* fans.

80%

» [2600] Always in the last place you look.





» [C64] She moves in mysterious ways.

DIAGONAL BALL 2

» **FORMAT:** COMMODORE 64 » **DEVELOPER:** AVATAR
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/DIAGONAL-2 » **PRICE:** FREE



Some of the most interesting game designs come from taking an existing idea and rearranging the elements into a different shape. *Diagonal Ball 2* uses that approach, borrowing most of the formula behind *Breakout* and then removing the bat from the equation. The player is instead given control over the ball's movement, which, while an interesting variation in principle, doesn't work particularly well in practice because that movement can only be influenced occasionally rather than directly manipulated.

So even when the game speed has been dialled right down to its slowest option, persuading the ball to head in the desired direction is more a matter of luck than judgement. The counter-intuitive way in which the ball rebounds off bricks and walls and some questionable collision detection means that the challenge is chiefly the fight between player and control system, making *Diagonal Ball 2* a disheartening and not particularly entertaining experience.

41%

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community



>> Relaunched

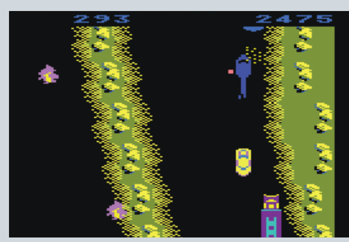
It's been a while coming because certain web developers have been tied up writing for **Retro Gamer**, but homebrew and independent game review site Oldschool Gaming is finally into its fourth regeneration. OSG has the task of trying to review new homebrew games for classic platforms, as well as indie titles – a bit like this section, but slower on the uptake. See it at **oldschool-gaming.com**.



» [Spectrum] Where's Buzzsaw? He had to split.

>> Released

The third preview of *Buzzsaw+*, already shaping up to be a remarkably colourful action puzzle game for the Spectrum, has recently been released over at World of Spectrum by its developer Joefish. Visiting **kikstart.eu/buzzsaw-pre** will get you to the discussion thread at their forums, and the first post from the author himself contains a link to the playable preview, which seems to only lack difficulty levels.



» [Atari 8-bit] Remixing the classics.

>> Remixed

It isn't strictly homebrew, but some of the people behind the excellent *Tempest Xtreem* are in the process of retrofitting the Atari 8-bit version of Midway's classic road-based shooter *Spy Hunter* with a brand new rendition of the Peter Gunn theme. Again, we've got a link to a discussion forum for you hiding behind **kikstart.eu/spy-music**, and there's an Atari executable there to download and listen to.

HOMEBREW

>> The scene's latest news and reviews

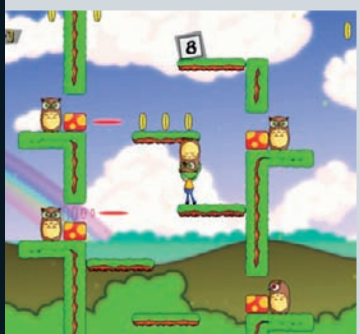
WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community

>> Apples and pears

Apple Jack is a cute Xbox Live Indie Games platformer starring a lad called Jack whose head is… an apple. If that wasn't strange enough, his enemies include pandas and runaway washing machines, and the level names we've seen are places in Suffolk. Is that normal for East Anglia, perhaps?

Anyway, it arrived too late for the deadline, but we've had a couple of goes and it seems presentable. We'll take a proper look in issue 80, but if you fancy giving it a try you can download it to your Xbox at **kikstart.eu/apple-jack**

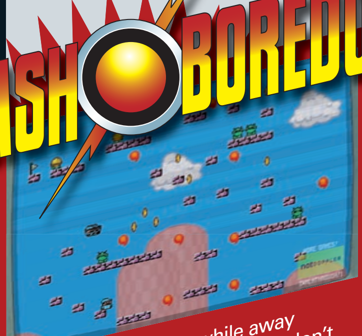


» [360] An apple… for a head.

>> Doctorin' the Tardis

More work-in-progress news from graphical powerhouse Smila. Along with many other projects on the go including a remake of *Last Ninja* and that virtual arcade covered a few issues ago, he's been posting previews of a *Doctor Who*-themed adventure where everything is drawn in silhouette. Although there are a few *Doctor Who* games around, the bulk of them aren't particularly good, so fingers crossed that this bucks the trend.

FLASH BOREDOM



Want to know how to while away those boring office hours? Then don't miss out on ***Retro Gamer*'s** Flash game of the month. This month we look at ***Enough Plumbers.***

IT'S NOT-A-HIM, Mario! In this alternative to the Mushroom Kingdom, moustachioed plumbers collecting coins don't get wealthier; instead they're cloned – and the single-screen mission is to get at least one of their group to the exit by any means, even if that involves sacrificing a couple of their brethren… **kikstart.eu/plumbers**

REMAKES WE'VE BEEN PLAYING…



Remake of the Month



H2G2 REMAKE

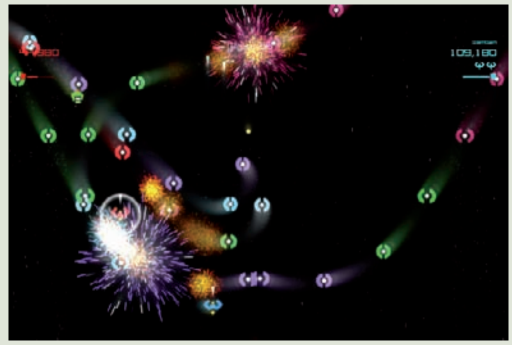


» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/H2G2

Remaking classic games isn't an easy thing to do right, and it's a particularly brave person who even considers taking a much-loved franchise like *The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy* and translating it into another genre, but *H2G2 Remake* is a courageous attempt at transforming the original text-based tale by Steve Meretzky and Douglas Adams into a point-and-click adventure.

To be brutally honest, the graphics could only be described as reasonable at best, and there's quite a bit of room for improvement in both backgrounds and character art, but considering the source material, the story is always going to be the most important aspect and survives the translation from keyboard to mouse control well. Adams and Meretzky's rather obscure trial-and-error puzzles are present, so getting a Babel fish from the dispenser still takes some time, lateral thinking and head-scratching for unprepared adventurers, and the dialogue, taken from the original game and the first *Hitchhiker's Guide* book with a smattering of lines written by the developers, still raises a smile.

Any point-and-click adventuring fans could certainly do a lot worse than putting some time into playing this and, although most of the puzzles are almost guaranteed to drive anybody who doesn't already know their way through the story absolutely bonkers, it makes a serious effort to amuse them until the men in white coats arrive.



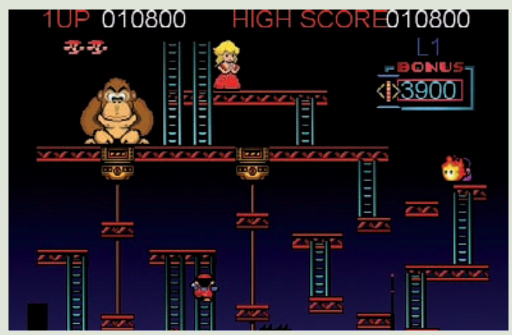
RETROFIT: OVERLOAD



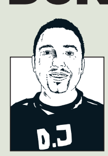
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/RETROFIT

***Retrofit: Overload* takes** the ideas behind *Galaga* and tries to ramp the intensity up. Large numbers of attackers swoop into the gallery before breaking away from the fleet for strafing runs, bullets in their hundreds rain down and, as the battle rages on, enemies become less vulnerable to shots and more willing to dive into single combat.

Regular waves are occasionally bolstered by boss craft, there are challenge stages and a chain-based score multiplier to rack up points with, and power-ups for the player's gun and recharging units for the temporary shield can be grabbed. Wrap all of that in some retro-styled graphics, sprinkle with brightly coloured explosions and then serve for hardly any MS Points. Delicious.



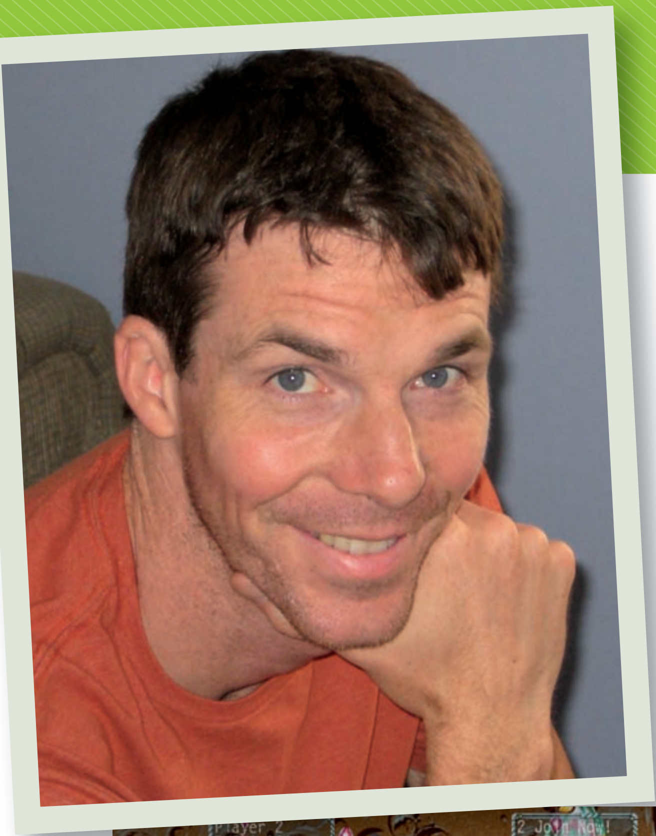
DONKEY KONG



» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/DK

How high can you try? The game that launched a thousand clones and the careers of several Nintendo mascots is back, but despite sporting some updated visuals and an enhanced soundtrack, this remake of *Donkey Kong*, based on Ocean's Spectrum version, feels as incomplete as the building on which Kong has perched himself.

Because along with being difficult to play due to alterations made to the jump mechanic and the collisions being remarkably overzealous, there's a serious bug on the third level that can leave Mario levitating high above the ground. For *Donkey Kong* fans it's worth a look, but we'd recommend reading through the Retro Remakes thread to see if the more pressing issues have been attended to before downloading.



HOMEBREW HEROES

NATHAN FOUTS OF MOMMY'S BEST GAMES WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR SHOOT 1UP, WHICH WE LOOKED AT IN ISSUE 78. AS HAS BEEN NOTED PREVIOUSLY IN THE MAGAZINE, WE LOVE A SPOT OF BLASTING HERE AT RETRO GAMER, SO WE BORROWED HIM FOR A WHILE TO ASK A FEW PROBING QUESTIONS

Q&A

Retro Gamer: What initially got you into writing games?
Nathan Fouts: My rabid fascination with interactive moving dots of lights directed in an intelligent fashion. I had grown up on Atari and ColecoVision, NES and SMS, but when the Sega Genesis came out I knew true love. Something about that gritty palette and sweet music sent me over the edge, and it helps that I've always been attracted to freaky monsters and bizarre programming.

RG: And what led to Mommy's Best Games and Xbox Live Indie Games?
NF: The ability to make games for a console lots of people play with precious little pesky publisher prying!

RG: Of the games you've worked on to date, which would be the game you're most proud of and why?
NF: *Weapon Of Choice* brought a lot of new elements to the *Contra*-dominated sub-genre of run-and-gun shooters such as deathbrushing, the Spiderpack, and the Vengeance Missile. I love playing and seeing it run on an old, colour-bleeding SDTV – or sweet, clean HD too, I suppose. And it's been honoured several times over, including in *Guinness World Records*, so I feel other people liked the game as well. If Mecha Lilith hears me say that, though, she'll be right jealous.

RG: What would you consider the most enjoyable and difficult parts of developing games?
NF: The most enjoyable is riffing on fruity ideas to make them even more bizarre. The most difficult is playing the game in development, trying to imagine myself in a new player's shoes, and working to make sure the gameplay is approachable but still maintains its hardcore edge.

RG: You're working on a new game, *Grapple Buggy*. What can you tell us about it?
NF: *Grapple Buggy* is an exploration game in which you pilot the titular buggy, traversing the alien landscape looking for valuable fuel, using super grippy wheels, high-tensile grapples, combat tethers, gargantuan swords and more! The story involves a human government and an alien race tentatively co-operating on the expedition but ultimately looking to bamboozle each other and reap the lucrative rewards. The player gets to decide in which camp – or neither! – they fall.

RG: And what plans do you have for the future? Any genre that you'd like to try but haven't to date?
NF: The future is busy. In addition to Mommy's Best Games proper, we also run 8 Bit Horse (**www.8bithorse.com**), which is solely devoted to console games in glorious 2D.

As for other genres, I wouldn't mind trying out 'sci-fi racing with weapons', or possibly 'lightgun shooter'. But honestly, I think I love 2D too much for those. We've got several new, wild action games slowly growing in the loving MBG womb.

RG: And finally, what advice can you give to any would-be homebrew developers who might be reading?
NF: Play lots of other games but don't play too many. That is, if you're remaking something or appending old ideas, work hard to get your original thoughts through primarily and not have your games end up like so much rehashed tripe. Mmmm. Now that sounds tasty.



» [360] The posh-sounding *Shoot 1UP*.



» [360] Run and gun delights on Xbox Live Indie Games.



HIGH FIVE

The Indie Games that Nathan can't live without

1. **Prismatic Solid** Vert shmup with strategic weapons in shapely environments. I don't know if even Microsoft knew the 360 could display this many polys, this fast, and with collisions.
2. **SoulCaster** Action 'mage defence' game, with an interesting fantasy story and great music.
3. **Breath Of Death VII** Fantasy RPG, which pokes fun at role-playing trappings while simultaneously weaving its own fine story.
4. **Veks And Silence** Gritty run-and-gun shooter with off-the wall humour and attitude.
5. **Leave Home** Psychedelic shmup, in which each play session always lasts five minutes, but changes based on how you play.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

APPLE LOVE

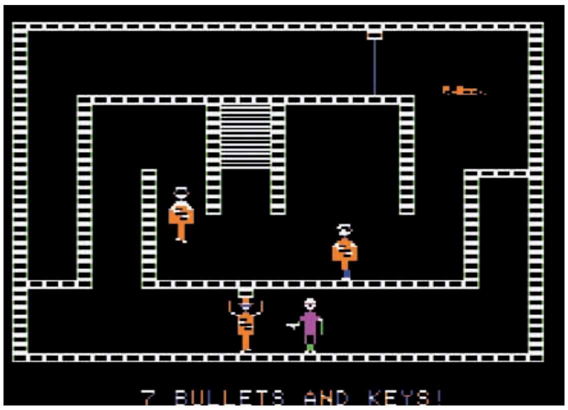
Dear **Retro Gamer**,
When I saw that there was a special on the Apple II, my head exploded from all the excitement and I had to go and find someone who was good at puzzles so they could put it back together. Then when I regained my composure and opened up to the double-spread with screenshots of all those Apple classics, I was milliseconds away from spontaneously combusting, but was lucky my friend also had a fire hydrant on him to put out the erupting blaze. That was a close call.

My friends, you have made my day and I shall ponder again over those glossy pages in a nostalgic daze, wistfully reminiscing of the times spent illuminated in that soft green glow as I tried once more in vain during the later hours to figure out how on earth I was going to get out of the guard-riddled bunker with just five bullets, a bunch of useless passes and a pathetic limp in *Beyond Castle Wolfenstein*.

Ahh yes, indeed those were the days.

Rob, via email

We're really glad that you enjoyed the Apple II feature, Rob. We're aiming to get more US content in the magazine, so it shouldn't be too long before you see another article on Apple's machine.



» [Apple II] Rob was pleased as punch to see more Apple coverage in the magazine.

THE GREAT RETRO HUNT

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
Just wanted to see that I absolutely love your magazine! I have been a regular reader since I've been able to find your book on the newsstands (around issue 40 or so). However, **Retro Gamer** is nigh impossible to find sometimes, and collecting the back issues is a task more suitable for Indiana Jones than myself. I have the eMags, but they're just not the same as holding printed, bound matter in my two delicate hands.

So how about a series of reprints for gals like me that want the real thing (or, as close to the real thing as possible)? Using your bookazine format, why not reprint four or five issues sequentially (per volume) and release them on a quarterly schedule? It seems a bit of a no-brainer to someone from the States where this seems to be the order of the day for the more niche publications.

Waiting patiently,
Natasha Hubbard

Glad to hear that you enjoy reading the magazine, Natasha. While Retro Gamer can be tricky to find in the States we have been reliable informed that it is on sale in most of the country's Borders and Barnes & Nobles. We also quite like the idea of reprinting earlier issues, but we'll have to look into the practicality of this.

INPUT, INPUT

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
I really enjoyed the Atari 7800 feature in

STAR LETTER

BUILDING RELATIONS

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
First off, I must say you are doing a wonderful job on the magazine. I read every article each month, and have learned about a lot of game systems I just wasn't interested in before.

Anyway, I have successfully 'introduced' **Retro Gamer** to Taiwan. Here is a photo of **Retro Gamer** magazine making its way up Taroko Gorge in Eastern Taiwan. We both made it there and back in one piece and lived to tell the tale.

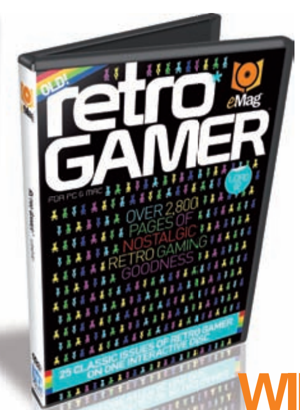
I thank you for your time and hope you don't listen too much to the naysayers who say things like: "I will cancel my subscription if you ever feature *Manic Miner* again." They will *not* cancel their subscription; they are just trying to throw their weight around.

You are doing a great job on the magazine and I really hope that you can do a feature on Tomytronic 3D handheld games in the future as I had the blue one.

From Andrew Masters, Thailand



See, this is our perfect letter. Someone praises the magazine, sticks up for us, introduces Retro Gamer to a new part of the world and even sends us a picture as proof. Have an eMag for your trouble. We hope you like it.



WIN!
Every month, one lucky reader will receive a copy of our latest eMag, **Retro Gamer Load 2**, a bargain if ever there was one. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls. Failing that, something funny with swear words, or something *Strider*-related will go down just as well…



CONTACT US

Snail Mail: Retro Gamer, Imagine Publishing, Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH2 6EZ

Email: retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk



YOUTUBE UPDATE

IT'S A SAD DAY in YouTube land, as Darran's decided to stop bidding for a complete PAL Dreamcast collection. He managed to get up to 176, but decided to call it a day. He's using funds from it to start another, so head to **www.youtube.com/user/RetroGamerDaz** to see what he's wasting his cash on now



» Yes it was incredibly uncomfortable to hold, but unfortunately this was the norm at the time for most joysticks.

issue 78 (what a convenient number, by the way), though I can't help but wonder why the notoriously odd 7800 controllers were only very briefly touched on in the piece.

I don't claim to know much about the 7800's reasons for failing, but I'd imagine that a questionable method of input might have played a part, even if substitutes like the Atari 2600 joystick were readily available.

A subject of such infamy would have been a valid point to explore a bit, particularly since issue 77's 32X feature seemed to mention every single possible negative thing that harmed the system's performance.

I'm not annoyed about all this, but just a tad baffled. Was the controller deliberately left out or was it just something you missed?

Curious as to your response,

Ciaran McConville, Poole

We passed your letter over to Martin Goldberg who wrote the original article. Here's his reply.

"Regarding the 7800's Proline controllers, unfortunately they were not known for being notoriously odd. Their shape and orientation were quite common with early Eighties systems like the Atari 5200, Colecovision, Interton VC4000, APF MP1000, Sega SG1000, and even computer systems like the Texas Instruments TI99/4A, which all had similar formatted controllers.

The controllers did not play a part in its downfall, and in fact in there were also NES-style thumb pad controllers available for it during its UK release. The 7800's downfall was purely from its inability to get licensed titles and third-party companies to develop new games due to Nintendo's lock-in development policy at the time. I hope this clears things up for you.

Sincerely, Marty"

So there you go.

SHORT AND SWEET

Hi Darran,

Just thought I'd say hello. Thanks for keeping the old games alive.

Best wishes

James 'Mr Silver' Leavey, formerly of Firebird

Thanks for that James, and if you're ever up for an interview let us know.

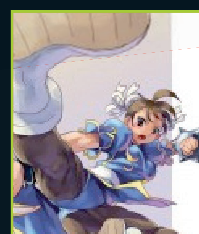
IT'S VC-20

Hi **Retro Gamer**,

I just wanted to say that I really enjoyed reading Iain Lee's column in **RG** 76. I didn't »

> "I was milliseconds away from spontaneously combusting!"

RETROBATE PROFILE



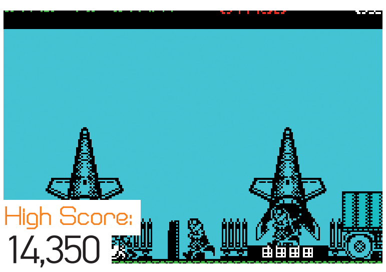
Name:	Gavin Eke
Joined:	28 Mar 2009
Location:	Norwich
Occupation:	Finance
Website:	Not given
Fave Games Systems:	ZX Spectrum, PlayStation



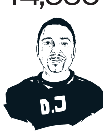
» The Imagine eShop has had a makeover and features the very latest issues of the magazine. Head to www.imagineshop.co.uk to place an order.

BEAT THE TEAM

Think you're good at retro games? See if you can beat the staff at some of their favourite titles



High Score: 14,350



DARRAN

CHOSEN GAME: GREEN BERET

Why I picked it: In memory of the late Jonathan 'Joffa' Smith.

Handy tip: Only the black enemies follow you up ladders, so you can hide on them to avoid most foes, which is very handy.



High Score: 31,560

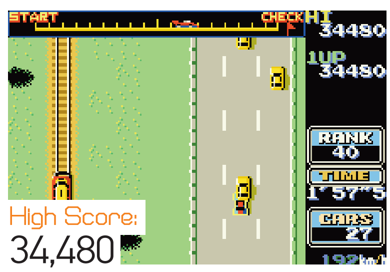


STUART

CHOSEN GAME: SNOW BROS - NICK AND TOM

Why I picked it: It's baking outside and I wanted a game to help me cool off.

Handy tip: You get more points for chaining attacks, so aim to get to the top of the stage, cake an enemy in snow then push him into the path of his mates.



High Score: 34,480



ASHLEY

CHOSEN GAME: ROAD FIGHTER

Why I picked it: It's dominated all my time in Game Room and rocketed into my personal top 10.

Handy tip: You need to maintain a speed around 350kph by controlling your acceleration and boost.

From the forum

» To have your say visit www.retrogamer.net/forum

Every month, **Retro Gamer** asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What's your favourite David Crane game?

SirClive Much as I loved *Ghostbusters*, David's legacy will be that he brought *Little Computer People* to the world. Such a joyful game that really needs a modern remake.

thevulture Easily *Pitfall!* Outstanding to play, tested you, yet never frustrated. Key element there, technically fantastic and considering what primitive hardware he had to work with at the time, his efforts make a mockery of today's developers with Blu-ray, powerful chipsets et cetera.

Denny Haynes *Ghostbusters*, quite original in its gameplay and oh that speech! Bloody brill on the C64.

Smurph Ah, it's got to be the cheesy *Night Trap*. The gaming equivalent of one of those microwave burgers – you know you shouldn't enjoy it, and it may make you vomit, but it's strangely great.

JetSetWilly I thought *Ghostbusters* was okay. *Pitfall!*, in my honest opinion, was much better. A simple, but demanding game.

necronom It's a close call between *Ghostbusters* (C64) and *Little Computer People* (C64). I'll go with *Ghostbusters*, but on another day I might choose *LCP*.

fulgenzio *Pitfall II Lost Caverns*, but *Decathlon* is still unbelievable…

martyg As far as original games (games that weren't simply ports or based on ports of coin games) it's a tie between *Freeway* and *Pitfall!*

TheDude18 *Dragster* (2600) who would have thought a game that short would be so entertaining and competitive.

Roo I'd have said *A Boy And His Blob* until last Christmas, but the 2009 WayForward update on Wii makes David Crane's version feel about 4,000 years old. Now, I'll have to go with *Pitfall!*.

Mayhem *Pitfall*. It changed the way platform exploration games were done. Thank the other Activision guys for making David give you three lives though, it was gonna be a one lifer until close to finish!

Chinnico I got *Pitfall* on the 2600 on my seventh birthday and that's why, while many other beautiful games were created by Mr. Crane, such the aforementioned *Decathlon* and *Ghostbusters*, this is the one that holds a special place in my heart. My mother also has fond memories of when we used to play it together, she could never manage jumping the crocodiles, missing the timing completely. She still remembers that with a loud laugh.

mrspud *Ghostbusters* is excellent. It works on every format it was ported too. And with a singalong intro sequence! Classic.

Teho GOTHT BUTHTERTH!!! MOAHAHA HAHAHA HAHAHAAAAA!!

Kai I fondly remember the awesomeness of *Decathlon* on the Commodore 64! Hey, Mr. Crane, I think you owe me a dozen joysticks!

Lorfarius Can't be anything but Ghostbusters. You have to avoid a jumping Marshmallow man! Gaming gold.

pottyboy I was going to say "GHOSTBUSTERS!!! BWAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!!!" but Teho beat me to it!

PanzerGeneral I will have to plump for *Pitfall! II: Lost Caverns*, no other VCS game pushed the envelope - both in terms of graphics and sound, the game wasn't bad either!

lavalyte *Pitfall!* and *Pitfall II*. Platformers will always be my favourite genre, and these started me off. *Pitfall II* was the first game I got into enough to map out on paper.

lanky316 *Little Computer People*. How 'a glorified screensaver' as some have described it as could be so addictive I'll never be able to explain.

the_hawk I love them all; the man is simply a genius. I have a real soft spot for *KABOOM*. It's an archetypal 'simple to learn impossible to master' game that is still a lot of fun nearly 30 years on.

Cafeman I choose the original *Pitfall!*, just barely over *Pitfall! 2*. Only with the original *Pitfall!* did I map out screens on paper more than one time in my life, just looking for the optimal path to treasure. And I love a game that can be beaten in only 14 minutes, even though it's so challenging to do so.

YOUR OPINION PLEASE

PACKAGING

rolan Personally, I just find it annoying paying extra on second-hand stuff for a box. I prefer loose carts/CDs as it's cheaper.

vorhees Loose carts are fine for me. Each to their own, though, and I will admit boxed collections look much nicer than a row of grey carts.

speedlolita For all cart stuff - except Mega Drive. I don't care if it's cart only. For CD games, I want everything obviously. When buying consoles I don't care about boxes either.

MikeFishcake Collectors look away now! Any games I've had in big cardboard boxes (hello, Amiga), I flat-packed and binned the boxes. I kept the floppy discs in shoeboxes, CDs on a spindle and manuals in plastic pockets in a ring binder.

EBAY PRICES

NRGuk Is Psycho Fox on the Master System, worth £15 delivered? Or is eBay just *really* giving me the wrong idea on what things are worth?

Megamixer Checking out the completed listings for actual auctions is the best way to gauge a game's value.

nokgod Just take an average of the completed listings. Don't include the highest or the lowest sale price. That should give you an idea of its current market value.

dste What you have to remember is that something is only worth what someone will pay for it.

James A I've also noticed that if a magazine runs a retro section on a game the price of it will generally bump up a bit.

CASTLEVANIA 64

Montytom Hi people, I've just been reading through last month's *Retro Gamer* and it had a bit on *Castlevania 64* being really bad. But I really enjoy it. How many people here like it as well?

Fightersmegamix I keep wanting to try it, I braved Hybrid Heaven for a while but it was too bad too persevere with.

Team Alfie I generally liked it at the time and I probably like it all the more now it's often written off as a disaster.

gman72 So we are all agreed then? Great game, highly underrated. A balance that will hopefully be redressed in a future issue of **Retro Gamer** in the soon to come Darran Got It Wrong section.

C=Style Been playing a little bit of *Legacy Of Darkness* – not bad at all. Controls take a bit of getting used to (certainly the camera), but it's good.

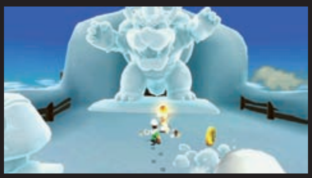
Darran@Retro Gamer You're all so wrong it hurts!

OLD vs NEW

Each month, we'll be finding out if the classics are better than their successors. This month, which 3D Mario game is the best?

Super Mario 64 (N64) | **Super Mario Galaxy 2 (Wii)**





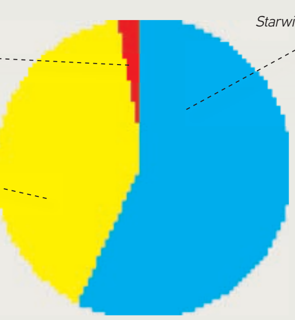
33% | 67%

JetSetWilly As much as I love *MG2*, *SM64* was the pinnacle of platform gaming in '97.

ShadowMan *Super Mario Galaxy 2* easily. I just find it far more fun than *64* ever was.

HOT TOPIC

Best Star Fox game



"The original SNES title was more innovative for its time, however I got a lot more playtime from the N64 version." – **Jet Pilot**

"Another vote for *Lylat Wars*. I was jealous of that title as a PlayStation owner!" – **IronMaidenRule**

"*Star Fox 64*. The first game to let you use the Landmaster tank, plus the battles against the bosses were great." – **JetSetWilly**

CONTACT US

Snail Mail: Retro Gamer, Imagine Publishing, Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH2 6EZ **Email:** retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk



[Atari 7800] There were plenty of great games for Atari's machine. You just had to know where to find them.

know that the VIC-20 was originally planned to be called Vixen and that the name was changed due to it sounding like a certain German word. I do know, though, that the game of the same name did suffer the same fate, as it was sold under the name *She-Fox* in Germany.

He wondered, rightly, why Commodore decided to call the computer VIC, then, when this sounded even naughtier in German. Well, the computer wasn't actually called that over here. For the German market, Commodore actually decided to drop the I altogether. The computer was simply called VC-20, which didn't sound naughty at all, as it was pronounced Fow-Tsay.

Best regards, Alex Vormbrock via email

Thanks very much for clearing that up, Alex; we're sure that Iain will be interested in what you've told us. Although it probably won't make him change his mind about the actual machine. Speaking of which…

VIC SHOCK

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

I sat down to read Iain Lee's column with great interest, as I have enjoyed his work for **Retro Gamer**, and the article in question was about my very first computer, my dear beloved VIC-20 that was kindly passed down to me/dumped on me by my older brother.

Surely he couldn't be slagging it off, as here is a man whose favourite game is *Elite* on The BBC B, and who has previously commented on the virtues of the Dragon 32 – hardly gaming's most popular machines, even in the retro community.

I was shocked to discover that is precisely what he did, calling it "a massive pile of elephant plop" and a "poor man's C64". I have to disagree strongly with Iain on this. I admit it was never the greatest computer, and certainly not as powerful as an C64, but I had some wonderful experiences on it, from *Cops 'N Robbers* to *Omega Race*, *Bombjack* and *Death Race 2000* and countless others. This was doubly uncool, as I was enjoying these games some ten years after they first came out. In fact, I saw a VIC-20 in a local museum in a section on Old Technology while I was still playing it.

The VIC-20 also was a testing ground for several game developers' ideas, including Jeff Minter. To call it a poor man's Commodore 64 is missing the point. Then again, maybe Iain hit the nail on the head when he said, "Who am I to say anything is crap these days… I thought *The Persuasionists* was quite funny."

Yours sincerely,

Chris Thorpe, Doncaster

Unsurprisingly, Iain's article has attracted a fair amount of interest since it was printed, and judging by the emails we continue to get, it's unlikely to stop any time soon. Obviously we will point out again that these are the opinions of Iain and that he's perfectly entitled to them and we'll also point out that they're Iain's views and not ours. Although we do agree with him about the 'Poor man's C64' quote. Regardless of the groundwork it laid down it wasn't a patch on Commodore's later machine.

> "To call the VIC-20 a poor man's Commodore 64 is missing the point"

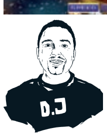
DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

World Cup

This month it has been England's pathetic performance in the World Cup that we've all been discussing. Stuart felt that it was a football fiasco akin to U.S. Gold's *World Cup Carnival*, while Steve is now trying to convince everyone that he is Brazilian and is having the Steven Gerrard tattoo removed from his back. Darran just wants to know if it was better on the Xbox 360 or PS3.

CURRENTLY PLAYING





DARRAN

Gradius V

Quite why Treasure has never been hired by Konami to make another *Gradius* game I'll never know. *Part V* is not only the best in the series – I kid you not – but is also arguably one of the greatest horizontal shmups full stop.

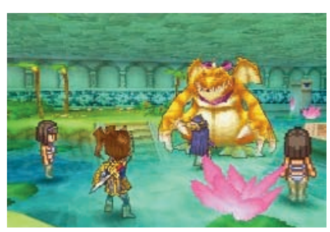




STUART

After Burner Climax

A near flawless conversion that proves that the Sega we all know and love hasn't lost its touch. I haven't been able to put this down this month, mainly due to the completist in me trying to obtain every unlockable in the game.





ASHLEY

Dragon Quest IX

DQIX has a beautifully realised game world, some terrific stories and addictive looting rivalled only by *Diablo*. The combat may be a bit old-fashioned, but then this is a retro magazine…

retro GAMER

Imagine Publishing Ltd
Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill,
Bournemouth, Dorset, BH2 6EZ
☎ +44 (0) 1202 586200
Web: www.imagine-publishing.co.uk
www.retrogamer.net

Magazine team

Editor Darran Jones
retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk
☎ 01202 586237

Editor in Chief Rick Porter
Senior Designer Stephen Williams
Features Editor Stuart Hunt
Sub Editor Olly Dean
Sub Editor Dan Collins
Senior Art Editor Greg Whitaker
Head of Design Ross Andrews

Contributors
Mike Bevan, Richard Burton, Stuart Campbell, Tim Clare, David Crookes, Paul Drury, Craig Grannell, Jason Kelk, Damien McFerran, Michael Reed, Mike Tooley

Advertising
Digital or printed media packs are available on request
Advertising Manager James Haley
☎ 01202 586432
james.haley@imagine-publishing.co.uk
Advertising Sales Executive Madeleine Jones
☎ 01202 586417
madeleine.jones@imagine-publishing.co.uk

International
Retro Gamer is available for licensing. Contact the International department to discuss partnership opportunities.
International Manager Cathy Blackman
☎ +44 (0) 1202 586401
licensing@imagine-publishing.co.uk

Subscriptions
Subscriptions Manager Lucy Nash
subscriptions@imagine-publishing.co.uk
For all subscription enquiries
email retrogamer@servicehelpline.co.uk
☎ (UK) 0844 848 8412
☎ (Overseas) +44 1795 592 872
13 issue subscription UK – £51.90
13 issue subscription Europe – £70
13 issue subscription ROW – £80

Circulation
Circulation & Export Manager Darren Pearce
☎ 01202 586200

Production
Production Director Jane Hawkins
☎ 01202 586200

Founders
Managing Director Damian Butt
Finance Director Steven Boyd
Creative Director Mark Kendrick

Printing & Distribution
Printed by St Ives Plymouth Ltd, Eastern Wood Road, Langage Industrial Estate, Plympton, Plymouth, PL7 5ET
☎ 01752 345411

Distributed in the UK & Eire by: Seymour Distribution, 2 East Poultry Avenue, London, EC1A 9PT
☎ 020 7429 4000

Distributed in Australia by: Gordon & Gotch, Equinox Centre, 18 Rodborough Road, Frenchs Forest, NSW 2086
☎ +61 2 9972 8800

Distributed in the Rest of the World by: Marketforce, Blue Fin Building, 110 Southwark Street, London, SE1 0SU
☎ 0203 148 8105

ISSN 1742-3155

retro GAMER

NEXT ISSUE ON SALE 19 AUGUST 2010



Move over Commando, you've got competition! How SNK beat Capcom at its own game

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

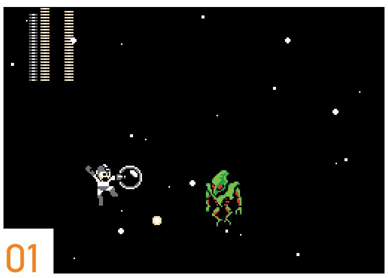
- Violet Berlin looks back at cult TV show *Bad Influence* and discusses how it helped kick-start the computer games show
- The developers of *Excitebike 64* reveal how they resurrected the cutesy NES game for a new generation of 64-bit gamers
- Our resident Atari expert Martin Goldberg is back with another in-depth look at an old Atari console. This time it's the turn of the Atari 5200

ENDGAME

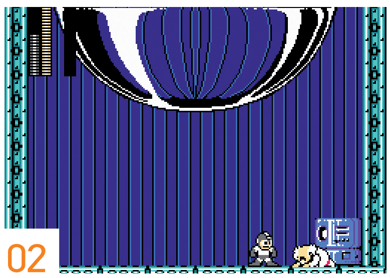


MEGA MAN 2

» Described by its producer as a 'rogue effort', owing to the fact that the original wasn't a massive success and so a sequel was greenlit on the condition that the team worked concurrently on other projects, it would be fair to say that Mega Man 2 surpassed all expectations. Given the series' difficulty, we're guessing there to be a few of you yet to see the ending to this game.


01

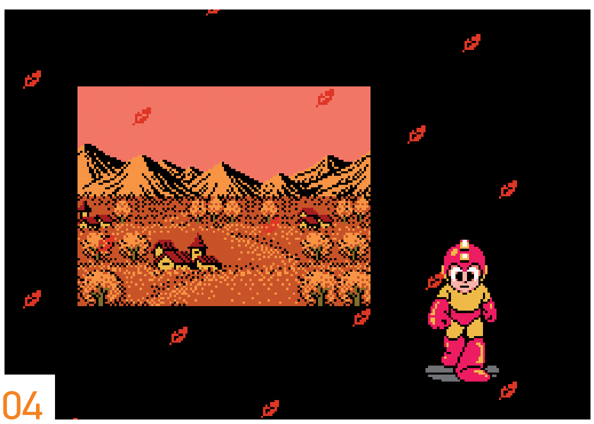
» After battling through various worlds to defeat Dr Wily's evil Robot Masters, Mega Man tracks Wily to his hideout where he must fight all of his creations again before facing the evil scientist – who has one more trick up his sleeve.


02

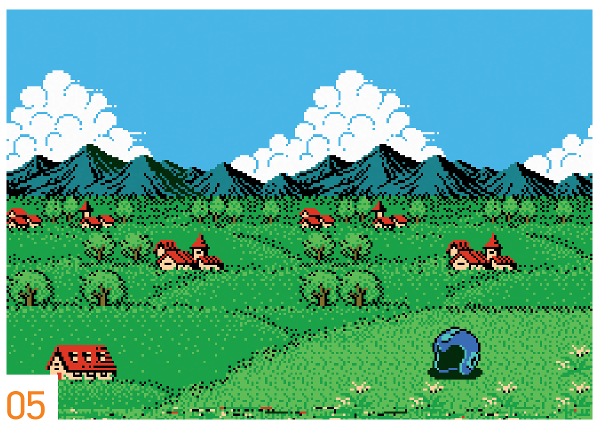
» After defeating Wily's final creation, a hologram of a flying alien robot – can holograms actually hurt you? – Wily drops to the ground and begs Mega Man to show him mercy. It's a little bit pathetic really. Show some self-respect, man!


03

» Ever the nice guy, Mega Man reveals that he has a human side when he shows compassion on his nemesis by walking away – leaving Wily to then dust himself off, get back in his laboratory and start the whole Mega Man game cycle over again.


04

» Leaving the fortress behind, Mega Man embarks on an epic walk to take in the entire events of that afternoon. This journey takes him long and far, and on his way he encounters all sorts of bizarre weather conditions, including leaf rain.


05

» Mega Man eventually finds a quaint village bathed in sunshine, blue skies and green grass and decides that it's a great spot to take a well-earned rest and recharge the old batteries – literally. How does that Paul Young song go? Wherever I lay my helmet?